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OR, The Gold Queen's Secret.

A ROMANTIC STORY OF REAL
BORDER LIFE.BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE BUCKSKIN ROVERS," "BISON
BILL," "BILLY BLUE EYES," "BUCK
TAYLOR," ETC.CHAPTER I.
A DARING ACT.ALONG a desolate highway, in a far Western
State, a horseman was riding one pleasant after-
noon.Pawnee Bill is G. W. Lillie, Government Scout and
interpreter, now living on his ranch in the Indian
Territory, near Medicine Lodge. "May Lillie, the
Gold Queen," is the wife of G. W. Lillie, and has had
a most romantic life on the plains.—THE AUTHOR.THE BLOW WAS A SEVERE ONE, AND HALF STUNNED THE DARING
LAD, WHO FELL HEAVILY.

His horse held his head low down, as he walked slowly along, showing that he was tired, and his rider sat in the saddle like one who was fagged out by a long journey.

I have said *horseman*, and yet the rider was a mere boy, a youth of sixteen, whose face was beardless, and whose golden hair hung upon his broad shoulders in many waves.

He was dressed in a homespun suit, top-boots, woolen shirt and wore a light-colored slouch hat.

At his back hung a rifle, and in his belt was a revolver, showing that he had armed himself to meet any danger that might cross his path.

His saddle was an old one, and it had evidently seen service in the late war, for I write of a time after the gigantic civil struggle between the North and South.

A pair of rusty saddle-bags, a roll of blankets, canteen and haversack completed his equipment, excepting a long lariat which was used to stake out his horse to feed when he halted for the night, or for rest.

The horse was a good animal, small and with fine points of speed and endurance.

The face of the youth was a marked one, full of fearlessness and resolution, while it was intelligent and possessed the stamp of character beyond his years.

"Rattler, you are as tired as I am, so we'll turn off in the woods and take a rest, as it does not look like a country where we'll find a stopping-place hereabouts," said the youth, and he turned from the highway into a clump of thick timber on the right of the road.

He unsaddled his horse, watered him at a near-by brook, and while the animal was left to crop the grass near, he threw himself down to rest, his saddle serving as a pillow.

He was soon asleep; but had not slumbered long before he was awakened by rapidly approaching hoofs.

Instantly he seized his rifle and took shelter behind a tree, as though he realized that he was in a dangerous locality.

Nearer and nearer came the horses, for his experienced ear told him that there were several animals dashing swiftly along the highway, and soon there came into sight around a bend in the road a steed and rider, with two horsemen pressing close behind the leader.

A glance told the youth that the one in advance was a female, urging her horse with all speed in flight from two men who were crowding her closely and gaining steadily.

It did not take an instant for the youth to decide upon his course, which was to protect the weakest party, as he was accustomed to do under all circumstances, and as the fugitive dashed by, with her pursuers close upon, her he sprung out into the road and cried in a clear, commanding voice:

"Hold there! Make me your game, not a girl!"

The maiden gave a cry of joy, while the men promptly took him at his word and fired upon him.

Instantly he returned the fire, though one of the bullets of the men struck him in the arm.

At his shot the man nearest to him fell from his horse, the other dashed upon him, as though to ride him down.

But the youth stood firm, conscious of his power to kill his second adversary and thus enable the maiden to escape.

Then came *snap! snap! snap!* as the revolver missed fire and the youth, wholly taken aback at the failure of his pistol to go off, was unable to get out of the way of the charging horseman and went down under the hoofs of the animal.

The blow was a severe one, and half-stunned the daring lad, who fell heavily, and was unable to rise, though he saw the man dismount quickly and rush upon him, firing as he did so.

Fortunately the shots flew wild; but the infuriated horseman meant to avenge his comrade and also to get even for being foiled in the intended capture of the girl.

"I'll kill you, curse you, for your daring to interfere with Black Ben in his work!" he hissed, as he rushed toward the prostrate boy, who was now wholly at his mercy.

But ere the fatal shot was fired, there came the sharp crack of a rifle from the woods, and the man fell in his tracks, while out into the roadway bounded a young man, his smoking rifle in his hand.

He was dressed as a huntsman, was scarcely over twenty, and had a bold, handsome face.

He ran up to the prostrate youth, who was still dazed by the blow the horse had given him.

"I hope you are not seriously hurt, for I saw your brave rescue of my sister, and tried to get here sooner to aid you," said the new-comer.

"I feel pretty shaky, sir, but I don't think I'm badly hurt— See there!"

As the youth spoke, the man who had called himself Black Ben, and who had fallen at the shot of the young man, sprung to his feet, and with a mighty bound reached his horse, threw himself into the saddle and was gone!

The young man's rifle leaped to his shoulder, but the hammer fell with a click, for at the moment he had forgotten that he had fired it to save the boy.

Hastily drawing a revolver from his pocket, he opened fire upon the flying highwayman; but the horse was going with the speed of the wind and almost out of range, so he had the chagrin to see Black Ben escape.

"I thought he was dead; but he's gone, that is certain."

"Now let me help you, and you must go home with me, for I live but a mile away."

"My name is Andrew Rolston, Junior, and you may have heard of my father, who is the wealthiest man in these parts."

"We are summering upon our farm, but live in the city."

Thus in a few words Andrew Rolston, Jr., had told the young traveler much about himself.

"I am a stranger in this country, sir, so know no one."

"Let me thank you for saving my life, Mr. Rolston, and I pledge you, I'll never forget the debt I owe you."

"Don't mention it, my young friend, for you risked it in defense of my sister, and we are the obliged parties, and the governor won't forget you, my word for it."

"But there comes Ruby now, and she would not have deserted you, for she's plucky I can tell you, had she been able to stop that iron-mouthed horse she rides."

As Andrew Rolston spoke the fair young fugitive, whom the boy traveler had rescued from her pursuers dashed up to the spot and threw herself from the saddle.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY RESCUER.

RUBY ROLSTON was a creature of impulse.

She was but fourteen years of age, but very beautiful, with her sunny-hued hair and dark eyes.

Her form was willowy in build, graceful and very mature for one of her years, while her face denoted a true heart and noble nature.

She was dressed in a handsome riding-habit, and she rode with the ease of one who was at home in the saddle.

A beauty she certainly was, and if not spoiled by flattery and the knowledge that she was an heiress, she promised to make a noble woman.

Her brother was six years her senior, and was one who seemed calculated to win the respect and friendship of those with whom he came in contact.

He had been out for a day's sport with his rifle and dog, and his sister had, as was her wont, gone for an afternoon's gallop all alone.

They were the only children of a rich banker, who dwelt in the city not many miles away, and having a fine farm in the country he was wont to spend a few months there each summer with his wife, son and daughter.

It was a fine farm, with a large, comfortable mansion, and a thousand acres in cultivation.

Their children were their idols, and so Banker Rolston and his wife were most happy in having them with them at the farm.

When Ruby dashed up to the scene of the tragedy, and threw herself from her horse, she grasped the hand of the young traveler in both her own, and said in a quivering voice:

"You saved me from those horrid men, and I fear you are hurt."

"Don't think I was a coward, because I ran off and left you to fight my battles; but I could not stop my horse."

"Tell me if you are badly hurt, for I can ride after the carriage for you."

"Oh no, miss, I am a little bruised, and was stunned for a moment or two."

"That is all, and I'm able to go on my way now, I guess, for I have a long journey before me."

"But, will I be held for murder, sir?" and the boy turned to Andrew Rolston, who was examining the body of the man whom the youth had slain.

"No indeed, for how can you be?"

"And you ran the other man off, brother?" asked Ruby.

"I saw the affair from yonder in the woods, sis, so did all I could; but do you not know that dead man?"

"No, brother," and Ruby shuddered as she gazed at the face of the dead highwayman.

"Well, I know him, sis, for it is Luke Dorian, whom father discharged a year ago for stealing from him, and who vowed revenge."

"Yes, I remember him now, brother, and he sought to capture me to kill me, or to make father pay a large ransom for me."

"They chased me nearly a mile," and Ruby shuddered at the remembrance.

"Well, but for this young gentleman you would have been captured."

"What is your name, sir?" and Andrew Rolston turned to the youth, who answered quietly:

"My name is Gordon Lillie, sir, and I am going West to seek my fortune."

"You have begun well to-day, Gordon Lillie, for the governor is generous and will give you a big stake for saving sis from those fellows; but you ride on home with Ruby, while I stay here by the body, and tell father and some of the neighbors to come so we can hold an inquest over the remains, for though we know all about it, the law has to tell us just how the man came to his death and all that you know."

Thus urged to become a guest at Rolston Ranch, as the farm was called, Gordon Lillie could not well refuse, though he hated to feel that he was accepting hospitality in turn for services rendered.

But he could do nothing else, and so mounted his horse and rode on with Ruby Rolston to her home, while Andrew remained by the body of the man whom Gordon Lillie had slain.

On the way to Rolston Ranch Ruby talked with the young traveler as though she had known him for years, and arriving at the mansion she presented him to her father and mother, who were seated upon the piazza and rose to meet her, as they saw her with a stranger.

"Father and mother, this young gentleman is Mr. Gordon Lillie, and I owe him my life, for he saved me from capture by Black Ben and Luke Dorian, whom you discharged from the farm and who swore to be avenged on you."

"Mr. Lillie was hurt, so mamma please take care of him, and father, brother Andrew is waiting down the road for you, and wishes you to come at once, for there is a dead man there, and there would have been two, but Black Ben escaped."

In spite of Ruby's off-hand manner of telling of her adventure, her words greatly frightened both of her parents, and the banker hastened away on horseback, followed by a wagon containing several of the farm hands, while Mrs. Rolston quickly had a room prepared for the youth whom Ruby now looked upon as her hero.

The dead highwayman was buried where he fell, after the county coroner had decided that his death was a case of justifiable homicide at the hands of a youth by name Gordon Lillie.

That night Gordon was given an easy-chair in the library, and the banker and his family were interested enough in him to ask him who and what he was.

"Simply an Illinois boy, Mr. Rolston. I have left my home to better my fortunes, as I am old enough to help my parents along, and I thought of seeking the gold mines, or becoming a scout on the border," answered Gordon Lillie modestly.

"But life on the border is full of peril, and a wild existence at that, while you will be thrown with a desperate lot of characters, my son," said the kind-hearted banker.

"I do not expect to go through life, sir, without meeting dangers of many kinds, and there are temptations about me at all times, to go astray."

"I think I shall do well, sir."

"Have you any objection to remaining here, Master Lillie?"

"How do you mean, sir?"

"You read and write well, of course?"

"I have such an education as I could get at a country school, sir; but I hope to be able to study hard and learn more."

"Then I shall give you the chance, my son, for I will offer you a clerkship in my banking-house."

"The duties will not be very hard, the hours from nine until about four, and I will give a fair salary to begin with, while you can work yourself up into a better place."

"What say you, my son?"

Gordon Lillie was silent for several minutes.

He had a romantic desire to win fame upon the plains, or to dig a fortune out of a gold-mine.

He was a boy of splendid physique, had never met his equal in strength among his fellows,

could ride like a Comanche, and was a dead shot.

Then he had been a great hunter at home, and loved the free life of the woods.

But here an opportunity was offered him which he should not refuse, and though he almost felt that it looked like accepting pay for what he had done for Ruby Rolston, he concluded to take the situation if he was sure it was not offered him for his services.

"Do you really need a clerk, Mr. Rolston, or are you offering me a place, sir, in payment for my accidental services to your daughter?" he asked.

"Well said, my young friend, for it shows the man in you.

"But I do need a clerk, and was about to write my cashier to get extra help, for I am enlarging my business."

"Do stay," said Ruby pleadingly.

"Yes, my son, remain with us, and do not go into the wild western plains," urged Mrs. Rolston.

"Try it for awhile at least, Lillie," said Andrew Rolston, Jr., and thus urged, Gordon Lillie yielded, and the next week became a clerk in the banking-house of Andrew Rolston.

CHAPTER III.

BLACK BEN.

THE banking-house of Andrew Rolston was situated in a part of the town which at night was deserted, for it was among the business houses.

A porter had always slept there at night; but he had been taken ill, and Mr. Rolston decided to offer Gordon Lillie a chance to make more money by taking the place of watchman, so far as sleeping at the bank was concerned.

"It will give you pleasant quarters, Gordon, and enough extra to pay your board, so you can lay up your regular salary," the banker said.

Gordon at once accepted the offer, though he knew that it was attended with danger and some privations.

He would have to carry the keys and always be in his room at nine o'clock, as the town patrol was withdrawn at that hour.

His room was a pleasant one, looking out upon the river, for the stream wound along at the rear of the building, and Mr. Rolston had fitted it up in a most comfortable manner, making the youth a present of the carpet and furniture.

From his room he could look into the bank through a window that commanded a view of the vault and offices, and he had to pass in and out through the main door opening upon the street.

Several months after having been installed in his new quarters, Gordon became annoyed at the fact that Andrew Rolston, Jr., frequently became his companion at night.

He would be awakened up at night by a knock on the door, and would find Andrew there very much the worse for drinking.

The young man had become cashier of the banking-house, and Gordon was sorry to see him spending his nights in dissipation, when his parents, who dwelt in the edge of the town, believed that he was working at the bank, and at such times was wont to share his quarters with him.

That Mr. Rolston did not suspect his son's wild life was certain, and in fact, as all his escapades were after nightfall, no one believed him to be other than a thoroughly sober young man, one who would become a worthy successor of his father.

Upon Sundays and holidays Gordon was wont to dine at Cedar Hill, the elegant home of Banker Rolston, and he noted on such occasions that Andrew never drank more than one glass of wine at dinner.

Studying hard, Gordon Lillie felt that he would soon have a good education, and he never once regretted his having remained as a clerk in the employ of the banker.

His extravagance was in keeping his horse, which he exercised every day in a gallop out into the country, and also he would carry along his rifle and revolver and keep up his practice with them.

Frequently Ruby was his companion on such rides, and between the two there had sprung up the strongest friendship, a regard that was deepening steadily into love, young as the two were.

One afternoon Gordon was returning from his accustomed ride, and he was alone, when suddenly he met a horseman at a turn in the road.

The man wore a heavy beard and long hair, and was well mounted.

He seemed to start at meeting the youth, but bowed politely and rode on.

"Where have I seen that man before?" said Gordon to himself, as he went on his way.

"I have met him somewhere, and under disagreeable circumstances, I am sure; but I cannot place him."

For a mile or more he rode on his way, trying to recall the face of the horseman.

Suddenly a cry broke from his lips, and wheeling his horse, he dashed back along the road at a gallop.

He kept up his rapid gait for several miles, and then came in sight of the horseman, as he ascended a hill ahead of him.

It was certain that the man had ridden rapidly also; but as he saw the youth he drew rein and allowed his horse to continue on at a walk.

But Gordon kept on at a gallop, and was soon in hailing distance of the horseman.

"Hands up, Black Ben, for you are my prisoner!" shouted Gordon Lillie as he rode up behind the horseman.

But the man whom he had recognized, as Black Ben, the Highwayman of the Trail, as he was called, was prepared for his pursuer.

He already held his revolver in his hand, and, quick as a flash he wheeled in his saddle and fired.

The bullet crashed into the brain of Gordon's horse, and falling heavily, going at a gallop as he was, he threw his rider against a bank, stunning him, while Black Ben, with a mocking laugh dashed on, as the rattle of wheels coming along a branch road warned him of danger to himself.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITORS.

By a strange coincidence the vehicle, the roll of wheels of which had startled Black Ben, was the carriage of Banker Rolston.

The banker was returning from visiting a friend living in the country, and was unaccompanied by any one excepting his driver.

Both the banker and the driver had heard the shot fired by Black Ben, and had seen a horseman dash rapidly by them.

A moment after they had come upon the dead horse lying in the roadside and saw Gordon Lillie just rising to his feet and passing his hands over his eyes as though he was waking up from a deep sleep.

Instantly the banker sprang from his carriage and was at his side.

"Gordon, what has happened?" he cried anxiously.

"Where is he, sir?"

"Who?"

"Black Ben, sir, for I met him in the road, and remembering who he was returned after him to capture him; but he was too quick for me and killed my horse, and gave me a fall that knocked the breath out of me."

"Did you see him, sir?"

"Yes, he dashed by me like a rocket; but are you sure it was that highwayman who was a terror to the country about my farm?"

"Yes, sir, I am sure."

"Yes, sir, that was Black Ben, as I know now, for I saw him once you remember, the day he robbed your wife, sir, when I was driving," the driver said.

"Well, we must put the hounds of the law upon his track, for he means no good in being here."

"I am sorry your horse was killed, Gordon; but you were too daring, to attempt the capture of that desperate man alone."

"I will give you a fine animal to replace yours, so take off your saddle and bridle and let us drive rapidly on to town, so we can put some one on the track of this Black Ben."

Ten minutes after, the splendid bays were going swiftly along the road toward the town, and the news soon spread of Gordon Lillie's adventure with Black Ben, the brigand, and he became a hero with all who knew him.

Black Ben, though pursued, was not taken, and soon after he was forgotten, and it was supposed he had left the country.

One night, some weeks after his adventure, Gordon Lillie was sleeping soundly.

The night before he had been kept up until dawn by Andrew Rolston, who had come in at midnight very much intoxicated, and had refused to retire.

So, utterly worn out, Gordon slept more soundly than was his wont, and failed to hear a noise at his window overlooking the river.

The distance to the ground on the rear end of the building was some fifteen feet, and the rocky shore was hardly as wide to the river's edge.

Down the river had come a boat containing three men, and its oars made no sound in the

rowlocks, giving the impression that they were muffled.

The boat came slowly, and it seemed that there was something in tow.

The night was cloudy, but warm, and Gordon, loving fresh air, always slept with his window up.

In fact, he had never anticipated danger from the river, as there was a high wall with a spiked fence guarding the back yard of the bank building, and the few feet there ended precipitately in a cliff overhanging the river some distance below.

The boat stopped under the cliff, and was anchored at both ends.

Then a dark object was drawn from the river—that which had been in tow—and was placed upright in the boat.

It was a ladder and the top reached to the edge of the cliff.

Up the ladder then went a man, ascending cautiously.

He stepped upon the cliff and examined the surroundings carefully.

Then he gave a low call and the other two men ascended the ladder and stood in the rear yard.

The ladder was then drawn up from the boat and that it made no sound upon the rocks showed that it had been carefully wrapped with cloth to prevent it so doing.

Then the ladder was borne to the side of the house and placed under the window of Gordon Lillie's room.

Up went one of the men then, and the sash being raised, he passed into the room.

All was dark within, but through the window looking into the bank came a dim light, for a lamp was always kept burning there.

The man cautiously stepped into the room, and listened.

The deep breathing of the occupant of the bed came to his ears, and holding his hand out of the window he dropped a pebble.

It was a signal for the others to come up also.

This they did, though one made a misstep and nearly fell; but the sound did not awaken the sleeper.

Cautiously through the room two of the men went, going into the bank, while the other stood guard at the window, and kept his pistol pointed toward the occupant of the bed.

Gordon Lillie awoke quietly.

He simply opened his eyes, and they fell upon a form at the window.

He did not start, for the thought came to him that it was Andrew Rolston.

Then he remembered that Andrew had gone that afternoon to a neighboring town on business, and also recalled the fact that he had not let him into the room that night.

So Gordon Lillie was wide awake and thinking.

But he remained motionless.

At last he decided to act, and that meant to spring out of the bed and try conclusions with his midnight visitor.

But, in the nick of time, he heard a clicking sound in the bank.

The man was not alone, then, this told him.

He must act cautiously then.

How many there were he did not know; but they should not rob the bank, unless they first killed him.

Slipping his hand under his pillow he drew out his revolver.

He did not wish to kill the man, but he would wound him.

So he leveled at the unconscious robber, who little believed that the young man was awake, and pulled trigger.

He had aimed at the arm resting upon the window sill.

There came a wild cry mingling with the report, running steps and the fight was begun.

Gordon had instantly thrown himself out of the bed, and as the two men rushed in from the bank he fired a second shot.

There was a groan, a heavy fall and an answering shot, and then a fall of a body upon the rocks below.

It was the man who had been wounded in the arm, and who had fallen in getting out of the window.

The third man gained the window with a bound and after several rapid shots toward the bed, went out.

Instantly Gordon Lillie sprang to the window and heard a heavy plunge.

One of the midnight visitors had escaped, but two remained, one groaning in agony on the rocks at the foot of the ladder, and the other lying motionless in the room.

Quickly the brave youth lighted a lamp and gazed around him.

A prostrate form near the door leading into the bank, told him that one of the men was dead.

Hastily he dressed, and then going to the bank's outer door, the one leading upon the street, gave the loud shrill whistle of alarm.

It was not long before two watchmen came.

They had heard no firing, as it had been within doors, and there were few people dwelling near the bank to arouse.

They at once gave another signal of alarm and in a short while half a dozen men were at the bank.

The man in Gordon Leslie's room was found to be dead, and the bullet-shattered bed showed that there had been a hot fire upon the brave youth, who fortunately was unhurt.

Descending to the yard with lanterns, the second man was found, and in a dying condition, for the fall had broken his leg and injured him internally, in addition to his bullet-shattered arm.

The boat still lay anchored under the cliff, but the third man of the party was gone.

He had sprung from the cliff into the river, and thus escaped by swimming.

But the dying man's confession told that the one who had escaped was known as Black Ben, and that he had planned the robbery, and also decided to kill the clerk, Gordon Lillie, after the bank had been robbed of its treasure.

The next morning the town was wild with excitement, and Gordon Lillie became more than ever a lion, while the thanks of the citizens, for his brave conduct, were publicly extended to him.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER A CLOUD.

AFTER his adventure with the bank robbers, Gordon Lillie still remained at his room, though Mr. Rolston told him he would place a regular guard there if he wished.

"Oh, no, sir, I do not think it necessary, for they have given me warning by their visit, and I will be prepared for them," Gordon had replied.

"But the spirits of the two men, I should think would haunt you, Gordon," said Ruby, nervously.

Gordon laughed at this, and responded:

"I do not believe in ghosts, Miss Ruby."

"Still, Gordon, I should think you could not but feel bad, sleeping in the room where you had killed a man, and, in fact, two of them, for it was your shot, the doctors said, that caused the death of the other one, rather than his fall."

"If I felt that I had done a great wrong, Mrs. Rolston, I would be sorely troubled in conscience at sleeping where the tragedy occurred."

"But I was protecting the property of Mr. Rolston, and I did my duty, while my life was also at stake."

"I cannot but feel it, that I have deprived fellow-beings of life; but still self-preservation is a law of man as well as of Nature, and I did but my duty."

"You are a brave, noble fellow; but I am glad after all, that Andrew has taken such a fancy to staying with you," Mrs. Rolston said.

"Yes, my son hinted that he stayed oftener than he cared for, as he felt that you must be lonesome," said the banker, and thus the conversation ended, while Gordon could not but smile at the excuse which Andrew Rolston, Jr., had given his parents for remaining at the bank at night.

The banker had given Gordon a splendid horse, in place of the one that he had lost, and the animal was said to be the fleetest in that part of the country, and to have the endurance of a hound.

As the animal was inky black, without a white mark about him, Ruby had named him Black Ben, and Gordon had rented a stable near the bank, and took care of him himself, thus saving a few dollars each week to add to his savings, which had begun to grow into a very respectable sum.

One night Gordon Lillie awoke, and though he tried his utmost, he could not move.

Something seemed to chain him to the bed.

There was a light in the room, and a form was moving about.

It was a form enveloped in a black cloak, and wearing a mask and slouch hat.

In vain he tried to cry out, to spring from the bed.

He was powerless to utter a word, or to move, and there seemed to pervade the room a sickening odor of drugs.

At length he dropped into a deep sleep.

When he awoke day was breaking, and his head seemed fairly splitting open, it ached so.

"What a nightmare I had last night," he said, and after an effort he arose.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon something on the floor.

It was a letter, and he picked it up.

What he read by the early light of breaking day seemed to surprise him.

His face paled and flushed, and he hastened to dress himself, though he need not have gotten up for a couple of hours.

He walked about the streets for awhile, and then went to the depot to meet the incoming train.

On that train Andrew Rolston was expected, for he had been to a neighboring town since the Saturday before.

"Let us walk up, Mr. Rolston, for I have something to say to you," said Gordon.

In a short while they were in Gordon's room, and the letter which he had picked up was shown to the young cashier.

Andrew Rolston seized it eagerly, and then said:

"I will see my father about it at once, Gordon."

At nine o'clock Gordon Lillie was at his desk, the banker in his private office and Andrew at his post, with the several other clerks ready for duty.

The cashier opened the safe, and at once uttered a cry of alarm.

"The bank has been robbed!"

The cry was heard by all, and every one ran to the side of the cashier.

"Impossible, my son!"

"It is not impossible, father, but certain."

"The safe has been robbed."

"But why?"

"I left ten thousand dollars in bank notes right here last night, and two bags of gold with five thousand more."

"Where are they?"

"Search the safe, sir," sternly said the banker.

The safe was searched but the money could not be found.

"You had the keys, Andrew?"

"Yes, father."

"Did you carry them with you when you left town Saturday?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet the safe has not been forced open?"

"No, sir, it was opened with the combination, as it only can be."

"Who knows this combination other than yourself, Andrew?"

"No one except you, father."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

The banker was puzzled, and for a moment did not speak.

Then he turned to the clerks and asked each one if he knew the combination to open the safe.

They did not, and Gordon Lillie also replied in the negative.

Then the father and son walked off together, and they told Gordon that they would go to his room for a conference.

They did so, and the result was that when the broker and his son went home after banking hours, they spoke no word to Gordon Lillie.

But upon his desk was a note, and it read as follows:

"I have decided to place a night-watchman in the bank, and he is to occupy your room, as your services are no longer needed in my employ, and I would advise that you at once leave town."

"As for the bank's being robbed last night of fifteen thousand dollars, I do not care to have the fact reach the public, so you will not refer to it, and I have so instructed my other clerks."

"I have placed in your desk in your room the amount of money due you, and I trust I will not have to be more explicit in what your good sense must tell me my wishes are regarding you."

"ANDREW ROLSTON."

Gordon Lillie was as white as a corpse when he read this letter.

For a long while he stood in silence, and then going out he mounted his horse and rode to Cedar Hill.

The banker declined to see him, but the youth boldly entered the room where the family were seated, discussing the robbery.

"Mr. Rolston, do I understand you that I am suspected of robbing the bank last night?" he asked.

"You have dared intrude, sir, and I will answer that I know that you are the robber."

"You know it?"

"Yes, for papers were found in your room, in

which you had been ciphering out the combination of the safe.

"No one else than you, sir, are guilty, so I beg you to accept my clemency and go, for if you remain here you shall go to prison."

"Go, sir!"

Gordon tried in vain to speak.

His heart and brain were full to overflowing, and he glanced appealingly toward the young cashier.

But the latter said:

"For the sake of your good service in the past, Lillie, my father will not prosecute you, unless you drive him to it."

"It is known that you have been dissipated of late, have gambled and lost heavily, and took the money to cover up your tracks."

"But go, for my father is merciful, and does not wish to send you to prison, and we will keep the robbery a secret, and pocket the loss, stating that you were called away unexpectedly."

One long look did Gordon Lillie give the young cashier, and then he was about to speak, and his expression showed that what he said would be bitter and to the point; but just then Ruby glided up to him and said:

"Gordon, I do not believe you guilty; but go, and in time prove your innocence."

"I will go, Ruby, and Banker Rolston, I thank you for your mercy to me under existing circumstances."

He grasped Ruby's hand as he spoke, and with a bow to the others, left the room.

As he was about to mount his horse, Ruby ran up to him, the tears streaming from her eyes:

"Oh, Gordon, is this not terrible?"

"But I do not believe you guilty, I again say; but go, and some day all will come well, I know."

"Good-by, Gordon, and remember that I love you."

In her impulsive way she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and without a word he sprang into his saddle and rode away like the wind.

That night he rode out of the town, and he carried with him only the sum of money, some seventy dollars, which he had had with him when he became a bank clerk, and all the souvenirs given him by the Rolstons, all except Ruby's photograph, he left.

His horse he felt that he was entitled to, and the money paid him by the banker he returned to him in an envelope.

Thus, after nearly a year, Gordon Lillie was as poor as when he had first met the Rolstons, and he went forth again in the world to carve out his fortune; but he went away feeling that he was under a cloud.

CHAPTER VI.

RED JENKS OF PROSPECT CITY.

THE desire of Gordon Lillie, when he rode out of the Illinois town, where life had seemed so bright to him, was to carry out his former intention and go to the far frontier.

He was older by nearly a year, had had much experience in business, which had made him a better judge of mankind, and he was imbittered by the fact that he was accused of a crime of which he knew that he was not guilty.

He had smelled powder in personal combat, and on each occasion, on the highway, when he rescued Ruby Rolston, when he had met Black Ben in the road and tried to capture him, and again in his room in the bank the night of the attempted robbery, his nerve had not deserted him, and he had met danger with fearless front.

"I have some seventy dollars, a good horse and outfit, and average pluck and will with which to begin life anew, so I'll not feel despondent," he said, to himself as he rode along.

The point for which Gordon Lillie aimed was Colorado.

He had heard much of the mining-camps there, and felt that he could see something of prairie life in going there.

So he set out by easy stages to make his way there, and by camping at night to become accustomed to a life of hardships.

One night as he was nearing his journey's end, and drawing near the Colorado border, he stopped at a small settlement and sought lodging at what some great stretch of the landlord's imagination termed a hotel.

It was known as the "Bonanza Hotel," and consisted of a dozen rooms, in which were half a dozen bunks against the wall and a mattress stuffed with prairie grass.

A common wash-basin at the well was for all, and the dining table was devoid of cloth or napkin, while the service, though called by Land-

Lord Jenks his "silver" consisted of the plates, cups and steel knives and forks.

It was asserted by the "guests" of the Bonanza that Landlord Jenks was a very dangerous man, and on several occasions had turned from carving the roast of buffalo or antelope, to use his carving-knife upon some boarder, who had passed the limit of a frontier host's endurance.

Having knifed his man, Landlord Jenks would coolly wipe his knife upon the sleeve of his carving blouse and continue to slice off juicy morsels for the hungry, while some one would roll the body of the unfortunate out of the dining-room to await burial later on, when the generous landlord would pay all expenses and serve as chief mourner over the corpse.

"And who has a better right?" was his unanswerable question.

The town was composed of railroad hands, wagon-train men, hunters, storekeepers and hangers-on, among the latter being some noted desperadoes.

There were not over a hundred shanties in the town, which was known as Prospect City, and the inhabitants were, taken altogether, a very hard set of citizens.

Gamblers were numerous, and cut-throats were to be found for the looking.

Such was the town in which Gordon Lillie took refuge one night.

He had avoided the settlements as much as possible on his westward ride, not caring to mingle with rough characters any more than he was forced to do; but he was about out of provisions and ammunition, and was told by a party of railroad men whom he met, that he could obtain supplies at Prospect City.

So to Prospect City he went, and he saw, as he entered the Bonanza Hotel, that he had arrived at rather an inauspicious moment for his own comfort.

The bar-room was the "office" and gambling saloon as well, and just as Gordon Lillie entered, there was a fight on.

It was a lively affair too, and shots rung out fast.

There was a scuffle, tables overturned, oaths and shouts, and the room was thick with dust and smoke.

Had he not put his horse up in the shed of the Bonanza, Gordon Lillie would have been greatly tempted to mount in hot haste and shake the dust of Prospect City from the hoofs of the animal.

He was not pleased with his introduction to real wild border life.

It surpassed his wildest dreams, and he felt that it was a place where he would not linger long.

But he was in with the ruins, and was pushed about here and there in the turmoil, until he was suddenly seized by the arm and dragged into a pen which was called the office.

"Stay here, lad, while I stop this row."

The speaker was Landlord Jenks, called by his intimates Crimson Jenks, not only from the fact that his hair was of a carmine hue, but also in honor of his gory character.

He had been a sailor in early life, and then, a giant in size and strong as a lion, he had taken to prize-fighting, and it was said that he hit so hard that his adversaries never recovered from the blow.

Having knocked several out of Time into Eternity, he had gone West to live, and thus had become the sole proprietor of the "Bonanza."

He had caught sight of Gordon as he entered, saw that he was young, and a stranger, and in the fight that was in progress, had made his way to him and dragged him into his den.

Then he had started forth, as he had said: "To stop this row."

He began well, for men went down under his blows, as though a mule had kicked them.

"Open that door!" he yelled in a voice of thunder.

The order was obeyed with alacrity, as many were anxious to get out; and out the stream of enraged humanity went, fighting and swearing as they moved.

But several remained, and these were prostrate upon the floor, some dead and others dying.

"Look to 'em, Foly," called out Red Jenks to his assistant, who had just popped up from behind his bullet-proof bar.

"They's down on you, Pard Jenks, and here they comes," cried Foly, again bobbing out of sight.

But he had told the truth, for into the door came half a dozen desperadoes who had made common cause against the landlord who had handled them so severely.

Gordon Lillie saw that he was in for it.

The office was a den, open on one side, boarded on the other three, and with a door in the rear, and through this Red Jenks had pushed him into the den.

Across the front was a stout counter of logs, bearded up on the outside and looking more like a breastwork than a desk.

Behind it was a rack, in which were a couple of Winchester rifles, half a dozen revolvers and a saber.

As the men came toward the office, Landlord Jenks bounded over the barrier like a circus tumbler, and came down within the den.

"Now, come on, you who want grave-yard tickets," yelled Red Jenks, as he drew his weapons, and waited with Gordon Lillie for the attack.

The men were maddened with whisky and fancied wrong, and rushed recklessly forward, firing as they came.

Gordon Lillie had drawn his weapons, for he knew that he would be considered as the friend of the landlord and be set upon too.

The door in the rear of the office was locked, so he had to stand and fight.

There was a rush, a dozen shots, heavy falls, oaths, and then the loud, mocking words:

"Run to your kennels, you dogs."

The fight was over and the landlord held his fort, for the attacking party had fled.

The place was too hot for them they found.

As the door closed behind them, Red Jenks turned to Gordon Lillie.

"I'm hit, pard, but it would have been six feet under fer me but fer you, as I seen yer kill Wild Ned thar, when he had me foul."

"I owes yer my life, and I'm not fergitful o' friends or foes."

"Put it thar, and mark down Red Jenks as 'yours truly.'"

Gordon Lillie grasped the hand extended to him, and then gazed around him upon the strange scene, while he heard how the fight had been arranged by a few, to rob the landlord's strong box during the turmoil.

"Now, young pard, you bunks in with me to-night, and to-morrow we'll go to ther burying, and thar's a clean half-dozen stiff to plant, as yer sees," said Landlord Jenks, again grasping the youth's hand.

Such was Gordon Lillie's entrance upon real border life among the roughs, and he could not say that it was all that he had anticipated it would be.

But he was not one to turn back from a trail he had made up his mind to pursue to the end.

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERIOUS WARNING.

PROSPECT CITY held no charms for Gordon Lillie.

He had seen it at its worst, perhaps, upon his arrival there; but he cared not to remain longer there to test its hospitality, and so, after an early breakfast with Red Jenks, who was most kind to him, he made what purchases he needed, and started on his lonely ride further into the western wilds.

He halted for the night at an old cabin, long deserted and situated upon a wooded hill.

It had been the home of a settler and his family, and Red Jenks had told him to avoid the place as it was said to be haunted, for some one had murdered the man, his wife and children one night, and no trace of the murderer, or the cause of the vile deed had ever been discovered.

"Since thet time, young pard, they does say thet ghosts walk about the old cabin by night, and maybe it is so, though I has'n't seen the spirits," Red Jenks had said.

But Gordon Lillie did not believe in ghosts.

He had serenely slept in the room where he had killed a burglar, and the spirit of the dead man had never haunted him.

So to the cabin he went, feeling that it was not only a more comfortable place to spend the night, for the air was chilly, but a safer retreat than in the open woods.

The cabin was a large one, with three rooms, and the door swung open, as though inviting him to enter.

In front of the cabin were the graves of the settler and his family, five in all, and the rude furniture of the place had not been removed, though the bedding and lighter articles had.

The night came on threatening a storm, and Gordon let his horse feed upon the rich grass about while he gathered wood to last him until morning.

He soon had a cheerful fire burning on the hearth, and began to cook his supper, which was an inviting repast, as he had killed some

game and caught a few fishes during the day, when he halted for rest at noon.

A spring near furnished him good drinking water, and, having led his horse into one of the rooms, he sat down in calm enjoyment of his comfortable retreat.

He felt sorry for the poor settler, but the fact that they had been murdered there, and their graves were within a few feet of him gave him no uneasiness.

With the provisions he had purchased at Prospect City, and his game and fish, he had a most sumptuous supper for a border traveler, and ate heartily.

Then he read by the fire-light, a book which he had taken from his saddle-bags; but becoming sleepy he soon arranged his traps, to be ready to leave at a moment's notice if necessary, and wrapping himself in his blanket was soon in deepest slumber.

How long he slept he did not know, but soothed by the patter of the rain upon the roof, he certainly was in deepest repose for several hours.

Then he awoke with a slight start.

The fire had burned low, and there was only a flickering blaze which gave a weird light through the cabin.

But there was light enough to reveal to him the startling fact that he was not alone.

He had searched the cabin on his entrance, going through the three rooms in it, and before going to sleep had seen that the doors and windows were securely barred.

But still there was another person in the room with him, and more, there was a most spectral look about the one upon whom his eyes fell.

Standing in the door between the room where he was and the one adjoining where he had put his horse was a tall, form clad in a white robe, evidently the skin of a grizzly bear.

His head was covered by a cap of the same shaggy fur.

His feet were incased in rude moccasins, and his hair and beard were long and white.

He certainly was an ugly looking customer to meet by night in that lonely cabin.

If he was armed, the weapons were not visible, and he certainly had a most substantial look for a ghost.

He stood in the doorway gazing at the youth, who was taken aback at his presence, and then, with a sudden turn, he went back out of sight.

Instantly Gordon Lillie was upon his feet, and in a short while he had drawn on his boots, and pistol in hand, approached the fire.

A handful of wood was thrown upon the fire, and a bright light soon illumined the room.

Then Gordon Lillie set about an investigation of the strange sight he had witnessed.

He entered the next room cautiously, and ready to meet the strange being with a shot if it came to a struggle for life.

His horse was over in the corner lying down, and so appeared not to have seen what his master had.

The room was unoccupied, save by the animal, and a search revealed no sign of the midnight visitor.

Gordon remembered that Red Jenks had told him that the settler had been a large man, with white hair and beard.

The one he had seen there, in his white bear-robe, certainly looked as though he might be the settler's ghost.

As he could find no trace of the strange being, Gordon felt a nervous chill stealing over him.

The door was barred, as when he went to bed, from the inside, and the manner in which he had fastened the window was the same.

There were a few planks overhead, forming a loft, but it afforded no hiding-place for the large man whom he had seen.

There was a fireplace in the room, but the chimney was too small for a man to ascend, and thus find entrance and exit.

The youth was mystified, and began to wonder if he had not been dreaming.

This thought, that he had had the nightmare after his hearty supper, and brought up by what Red Jenks had told him of the cabin, reassured him, and he once more lay down to sleep.

It was some time before he again fell off to sleep, and when he did it was not to be disturbed through the hours that remained of the night.

It was daylight when he awoke, and his dream flashed across his mind the first thing.

"How real it was!" he muttered, as he entered the room where his horse was.

There stood Black Ben, looking as though he wanted to be out feeding upon the juicy grass, after the rain upon it.

"You shall have a good breakfast, Black Ben; but I am late, as my rest was disturbed by a nightmare last night."

"You didn't see any ghost, did you?"

And he patted his horse affectionately as he spoke.

Suddenly Gordon Lillie started, for there, upon the glossy black side of the horse was a skull and cross-bones, drawn in white clay, and beneath the hideous emblem the one word:

"Beware!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AT BAY.

Brave boy that he was, Gordon Lillie could not but feel upset at what he beheld.

His horse stood quietly at his side, just where he had hitched him the night before, and the knot of the lariat was the same that he had made.

There was no doubt now but that it had not been a dream, his seeing of the strange man in the doorway during the night.

He had certainly been there, and he recalled the fact that the same sign, of the cross-bones and skull, were upon the front door of the cabin with the warning word written beneath it.

He had also seen the same uncanny symbol on the bark of a tree at the spring near by, cut deep into the wood.

But where the strange being had gone, how he had entered the cabin and left it, the youth could not understand.

Considerably worked up about the affair, Gordon led his horse from the cabin to stake him out near by and water him, after which he intended to get his own breakfast and start upon his way.

He made it a rule to travel by easy journeys, never pushing his horse, and the result was that Black Ben was in splendid condition.

He had just driven the lariat-pin into the ground, when suddenly a shot and the whiz of a bullet by his head came almost together.

Then followed several other shots, the balls rattling about him, and one slightly clipping his shoulder.

To pull up the stake and run into the cabin with his horse, was Gordon's first act.

Hastily tying the animal, he seized his rifle and sprung to the door.

There he saw five horsemen coming at a run toward the cabin.

They had fired at him from long range, and he had not seen them until their bullets rattled around him.

"I must be more careful in this country."

"I came very near being caught that time," he muttered, as he glanced from the door and took in the situation.

The five horsemen were dashing straight for the cabin, and firing as they came.

They seemed to understand the situation, that there was but one person to meet them, and he a youth, for they were strangely reckless.

The cabin had small port-holes for rifle-barrels to be thrust through and fired, the settler having prepared against a siege, or an attack, when he built his house.

Closing the door and barring it, Gordon sprung to one of these little port-holes and gazed through it.

The horsemen had reached the timber, which surrounded the cabin, and were dividing as though to encircle it.

One of the men, who was giving an order, the youth set down as a leader, and he recognized him as one whom he had seen at Prospect City the night before, and whose brother he had shot, in the attack upon the landlord of the Bonanza.

This convinced him that he was the game that they were after, and he felt certain that their motive was revenge.

That they had followed him from Prospect City was certain, and as their only motive could be to kill and rob him he at once decided to act promptly.

They had begun the attack, and, acting in self-defense, he took aim and fired.

The horse of the leader caught the bullet in his head and went down, throwing his rider.

Without waiting to see more, Gordon ran to another eye-hole and gave another of the horsemen a shot.

He knew that he had hit his man, for he heard his cry of pain and the bitter oath that followed, while the horseman spurred hastily out of range and took refuge behind a tree.

A visit to the rear of the cabin showed the youth that his fire upon his foes had made them cautious, for they seemed all to have sought shelter.

But in this he was mistaken, for he heard a rapid footfall without, and a voice cried:

"Pard, throw up the sponge and we won't kill you."

The answer of Gordon Lillie was to the point: "You throw up your hands, pard, or I will kill you."

The man laughed, and it was a mocking laugh, as he responded:

"Blaze away then, for I keep my hands down."

He saw only the solid wall of the cabin, and felt that he was safe.

But through what appeared to be a knot-hole in the timber came the muzzle of a rifle and quick as he was in spurring away he was not quick enough, for a bullet went crashing into his brain.

Away went his horse at a gallop through the woods, and the curses of his companions were horrible to hear.

But Gordon Lillie's blood was up, and he meant to do or die.

He knew that the men had come to kill him, and that the chances would be against him when night came on, so he intended to spare no one if he got a chance to shoot him down.

The cabin was on an unfrequented trail, and Landlord Jenks had directed him that way to have him avoid lawless men upon the regular Overland route.

He could look for no succor, and if besieged in the cabin, as he doubtless would be, he would be starved into a surrender, or they would break in the door and rush upon him.

If they feared to do this they could set the cabin on fire and that would quickly end it.

"If they burn us out, Black Ben, when night comes, we must make a dash for it; but matters look bad for us now," he said to his horse, who gave a low whinny, as though in full sympathy with his master in the perilous situation in which he found himself.

Feeling the necessity to be on the watch, Gordon went from room to room, keeping up his round and looking through the eye-holes on each side of the cabin.

He saw that the men still surrounded the cabin, one of them having caught the horse of the man who lay dead just outside of the door.

That the wound he had given one could not have been serious, he knew, as he beheld the fellow on duty, having become the more determined to capture the one who had wounded him.

It was certainly a time of peril for the brave boy, and he frankly admitted to himself that he was sorry that he had gone West.

"If I get out of this scrape, I think I'll be content to live among civilized people," he said, aloud, and Black Ben whinnied as though approving of the thought of his rider.

Thus hours passed away and the danger grew monotonous.

Gordon dared not cease his round of watching from the port-holes on each side of the cabin, though he became footsore and weary.

He ate his breakfast, from the remains of his supper, and yet Black Ben had nothing to eat and became very impatient.

At last the shadows of night began to fall, and Gordon Lillie knew that the end could not be far off.

But he did not lose his pluck, and still stood at bay, though he knew that under cover of the night his foes would begin active operations against him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SIEGE.

As night grew on, Gordon Lillie, who was watching closely, saw the men on watch, in answer to a loud whistle from their leader, leave their respective posts and steal away toward a given point.

They were evidently bound on a consultation as to what was to be done.

So the youth set to work to discover what was best for him to do.

He first thought of mounting his horse and dashing out of the cabin in flight.

But he remembered that upon the side where the men were not, there was a deep ravine, which a horse could not cross, and he would have to pass within easy range of his enemies to gain the open prairie.

Then Black Ben had had neither food or water for twenty-four hours, and might not be able to lead the other horses in a chase, even if he got by the line of fire in safety.

He therefore did not care to take the risk except as a last resort.

He then remembered that there was a large pile of wood, pine and oak, not twenty feet from the cabin.

If lighted this would burn all night, he felt sure, and, as the wind blew from the direction of the cabin, there would be no danger of its being set on fire.

It would also give a bright light all around the cabin and prevent the four men from stealing up under cover of the darkness.

"This will do for to-night, and I'll set it on fire if I can," he said to himself.

He had plenty of dry wood in the cabin, and so he made a bright fire on the hearth, lighting the ends of the pine-knots.

Then he opened the door softly, and seizing a number of pine-knots rushed out and threw them into the pile of wood.

The men uttered a cry as they saw him dash out, taken by surprise at his strange action; but they all sprung to their feet, from where they sat at supper, seized their rifles and fired upon him.

The bullets pattered about him; but he managed to thrust the pine knots down through the wood-pile and dash back unharmed.

The men rushed toward the pile of wood, as they understood his motive, determined to put out the fire; but a shot from the cabin clipped the ear of the leader, and they ran back to cover once more.

Slowly the wood, wet by the rain of the night before, kindled into a brighter blaze, and in half an hour it was burning well.

"Now let them come into view!" said Gordon Lillie, grimly, and he partook of some food from his stores, making himself a tin-cupful of strong coffee, and condoling with Black Ben that he had no food for him also.

After supper he once more began his tramp from room to room.

The burning wood gave a brilliant light for rods around the cabin, except in the rear, which was in shadow; but still there was light enough to see any one approaching in that direction.

Tramp, tramping away the hours, the night never seemed so long to Gordon Lillie before.

He was tired out, and his feet were paining him, while his eyes grew heavy.

He felt relieved that he had at least thwarted the men for the night; but what he should do on the next night he did not know.

At length the dawn broke, and the fire, as though feeling that its work had been well done, began to die out.

At a distance, on their posts, Gordon saw his enemies, and they seemed to have quietly settled down to besiege the cabin and drive him out by starvation.

Their horses were lariatied near, and each man had a small fire, cooking thereby his breakfast.

This made Gordon feel hungry, and he, too, cooked his remaining meal of bacon, a sweet potato and cup of coffee.

He gave some potatoes to Black Ben, who ate them with a relish, and then began his day of watching.

"I hate to leave you, Black Ben, for you've been a good friend to me; but the only chance I can see of saving my life is to slip out the moment it is dark and leave you here."

"I only hope you won't be burned up; but I'll leave the door open and turn you loose, so that you can get out if they set the cabin on fire, as they will surely do to-night."

"Then I must go on foot back to Prospect City for another horse."

"Life is sweet, Black Ben, and that alone makes me desert you, for we cannot go out together."

Such was Gordon's plan of escape, when night came on, and he got his things together so as to be ready to depart at the right moment.

He felt that he could crawl through the lines of his enemies, where he could never ride through them, and though it pained him deeply to leave Black Ben, he felt that to save himself was his first duty.

At last, utterly tired out with his tramp from room to room, and his watching, he wearily sat down to rest himself for his night-journey back to Prospect City.

Having had no sleep in so long a time he could not keep his eyes open, and soon was in a deep slumber.

But he sprung to his feet in alarm as he heard shots not far distant.

Rushing to the port-hole on the side from whence the firing came, he saw that the sun was setting, and knew that he had been asleep for several hours.

But, best of all, he saw a party of horsemen coming toward the timber in which the cabin was situated, and there were half a score of them.

In the timber were his enemies, two of them firing upon the advancing horsemen, while the

other two were hastily saddling and bridling their horses as though for flight.

In the leader of those coming toward the timber Gordon Lillie recognized Red Jenks, the landlord of the Bonanza Hotel at Prospect City.

CHAPTER X.

RED JENKS TO THE RESCUE.

A CRY of joy burst from the lips of Gordon Lillie as he recognized the landlord of the Bonanza.

He knew that he was saved, and though he did not think that Red Jenks had come purposely to his aid, yet he knew that it was a most fortunate circumstance that he was there.

He forgot his sore feet and fatigue, and instantly darted out of the cabin rifle in hand.

He was just in time to send a parting shot after his enemies, who had started in rapid flight.

His shot missed its man, but it brought down a horse and the rider was rolled over and over upon the ground.

When he sprung to his feet his three comrades were some distance off, and though he called loudly for them to give him a mount they dashed away more rapidly, feeling no desire to risk their lives by stopping for him.

Red Jenks and his comrades in the mean time dashed on in pursuit and soon came up with the man whose horse had been killed.

He held his hands above his head, and Gordon heard his cry:

"Don't kill me, pards!

"My hands is up!"

Red Jenks and several others stopped by the man, while the others pressed on in chase of the three fugitives.

Walking toward them Gordon Lillie saw that their horses were tired, and that the animals of his besiegers being fresh, were rapidly gaining upon their pursuers.

"It's no use, for our ponies is dead beat, and can't catch 'em; but we've got you, Alf Chambers," said Red Jenks, as Gordon walked up to the group.

"And what has I done that you should shoot me down, Red Jenks?" sullenly asked the man, whom Gordon recognized as the leader of his enemies.

Before Red Jenks could reply Gordon Lillie approached and the landlord of the Bonanza called out:

"Young pard, I is glad to see you, and that you has come out o' this scrape skin whole."

"Yes, Landlord Jenks, thanks to your coming as you did, I am all right, and I thank you and your friends for saving my life."

"You are welcome, lad, I can tell you; but has you laid out any of the gang, for here is Alf Chambers, as we calls Black Beard, and there goes three men of his gang; but there was five of 'em?"

"One lies dead over yonder by the cabin," quietly answered Gordon Lillie.

"You are a trump, lad, and don't let us forget it, for you've stood the gang off for a long time and sent one to the unhappy hunting-grounds o' Hades."

"But how is it you are here, landlord?"

"To save you, lad, for it was overheard by a friend o' mine, that Black Beard, whose brother you kilt in saving my life, had got together four or'nary pilgrims to follow you and make wolf grub of ye."

"I concluded I'd follow, too, and we started this morning and here we is, and I are glad we is on time."

"You are indeed, sir."

"Well, tell us all about it, soon as the boys comes back, for we rid hard and our animals is used up so can never catch them other fellers."

"But they had better keep out o' Prospect City, and I'm sart'in sure that Black Beard here hain't going to kick up no more rows in my hotel," and he gave a significant glance at the captured desperado which all understood.

The men soon came back from their chase, having been unsuccessful, and fires were built about the cabin, the horses were staked out, Black Ben neighing with delight when he once more got into the open air.

Supper was cooked, and as all sat about the fire Gordon Lillie told the story of his adventure and the men were loud in his praise, while ominous glances were cast at Black Beard.

After supper, Landlord Jenks remarked:

"Now, pards, it's business, for we must hang Black Beard, or we won't sleep well."

The man received the words in stolid silence, while Gordon said:

"I hope you won't hang him, Landlord Jenks, for he has done me no real harm."

"Waal, we will hang him all the same, for he meant to do you harm."

"He is a bad one, and Prospect City will be the better for his having left it for good."

"You has got to die, Chambers."

"I do not doubt that, Red Jenks, for I know what you are; but I have been a bad man, and I ask you to wait until morning when you break camp."

"You hopes to escape in some way?"

"I would certainly do so if I could, but I see no way, and I only ask time to make my peace with Heaven."

"All right, you can pray all night, and you'll need to; but you hangs before we start in the morning."

"I ask no more, Red Jenks," was the calm reply of the man, who certainly showed no fear in the face of the death that confronted him.

Then the prisoner was more securely bound and placed under guard, while the landlord and his men sought the rest they needed, especially Gordon Lillie, who was soon fast asleep, with no dreams to bother him of what the morrow might bring forth.

Red Jenks had told him how Black Beard had been heard plotting with those who had accompanied him, to follow on his, Gordon's trail, and kill him to avenge his, the desperado's brother."

Having taken a great fancy to the youth Red Jenks had at once started in chase of Black Beard and his party, and arrived in the nick of time to save Gordon Lillie's life, as has been seen.

About midnight when all in the camp were in deep repose, excepting the man on sentinel duty, who was watching the prisoner, and the horses as well, a wild cry caused every one to spring to their feet.

What had happened they did not know, until in their midst dashed the guard, who had thrown away his gun, and, as seen by the fire-light, was white as death.

"It's the ghost! he came right up to me."

"The ghost! the ghost!" he cried and sunk down upon the ground in abject terror.

Not a man laughed at his fears, for he was known to be a fearless fellow, and his terror was too plainly depicted upon his face and in his actions, not to impress them.

"Come, Larry, pard, what is it."

"Are you sick?" asked Red Jenks in a kindly tone.

"No, Pard Jenks, I'm scared, for I seen thet ghost, the spirit of the murdered settler."

"He came right up behind me and passed on as though he did not notice me."

"I could not move for a minute, then I yelled and ran here quick as I could."

"Oh! but it was horrible," and the man shuddered.

"Perhaps you were dreaming, Larry."

"No, Pard Jenks, I hain't a man to go to sleep on post and dream."

"I saw the settler's ghost, and it was tall, clad in white and with long gray hair and beard."

"I saw the same form night before last," said Gordon Lillie, and all eyes turned upon him.

Then he told the story of his midnight visitor, and the mark he had left upon the glossy hide of Black Ben.

He also told how impossible to find any trace of the being, whoever, or whatever he was, and the men were deeply impressed by the story, and there was no more sleep in camp that night for any one except Gordon Lillie, who quickly dismissed all thoughts of the "Ghost of the Cabin," and returned to his blankets to finish out his sleep so rudely broken in upon.

CHAPTER XI.

BORDER LAW.

THE alarm of the guard, and the desire, as they said, to catch sight of the "ghost," kept the party of Red Jenks awake for the remainder of the night.

They sat about the camp-fire, which they had thrown wood upon to make a bright blaze, and added to their nervousness by telling "ghost stories" until dawn.

Several had made a reconnaissance together, but could find no trace of the settler's spirit, and in truth they had not seemed very anxious to find it.

When dawn came they began to cook breakfast, and Gordon Lillie was aroused, after having enjoyed his sleep immensely.

Upon going to lead his horse to water, Gordon saw that the skull and cross-bones had again been placed upon his horse, and beneath them the word:

"Beware!"

Nor was this all, for upon each animal belong-

ing to the party the same hideous symbol had been drawn, a couple of white bones among the lot having it drawn in black.

The superstitious herdsmen were considerably taken aback at this, and if any one had doubted the guard's having seen a ghost during the night, they were certain that he had beheld some mysterious being.

Their subdued manner showed that they were deeply impressed, and they were anxious to get away from the dreary spot.

A substantial breakfast was given to the prisoner, and he ate it with a relish that was little like a man who stood on the brink of the grave.

"I hopes you has made your peace with Heaven, Black Beard, for you has got to be swung up in a few minutes," said Red Jenks.

"I was sleepin' most of the night, Jenks; but if I must die I'm ready any time."

"You has grit, great grit, Black Beard, and I wishes we didn't have ter hang you."

"But you is so infernal bad, if I was ter let yer off, you'd kill me, or somebody of us afore another day."

"No, you has got to hang, Black Beard," said Red Jenks firmly.

"I told you that I was ready, so fire away," was the indifferent reply.

The nerve of the man won Gordon Lillie's admiration, and he again begged for his life.

But the landlord was inflexible, and his men all demanded the death of Black Beard.

"He's a bad man, young pard, and would drop you or me, soon as I'd let him go."

"You've got a soft heart, but you must harden it if you intends to live out here, for it will git you into trouble."

"Come, pards, let's have this hanging picnic over with, and get away from here."

In response the men gathered around him, indifferent to the fate of the man whom they were to launch into eternity.

They had their horses saddled and bridled and were all in readiness to start as soon as Black Beard was swung up in mid-air.

Gordon Lillie felt that he could do nothing to avert the death of his enemy.

He was sorry for him, and, having never before witnessed a scene of border justice, as the men called it, he turned away to gather up his traps to depart.

The men said nothing to him.

They, too, in their early life on the plains had shunned, as he did, a tragic scene brought about by Frontier Law, with "Judge Lynch" the head and front of the situation.

Black Beard still remained firm, wholly indifferent he appeared, and when told to mount a horse, which was to serve as a scaffold, he did so.

A lariat was then thrown over a limb above his head, one end made fast to a tree, and the other placed about his neck.

"Has you got anything to say, pard, for you is a dying man?" said Red Jenks.

"I only wish to say that I hope you'll catch and hang the four men who were with me, and who deserted me in such a cowardly manner."

"Who are they, Pard Black Beard, for we wants law against all such fellows as you, who try to make this country a lawless community," responded Red Jenks.

"They are Barney Burt, Slick Sam, and Kansas Charlie, and it would be a satisfaction to me here in my last minute of life, to feel that the cowards would quickly follow me," and a flash of intensest revenge came into the eyes of the man.

"We'll mark 'em for trial, pard, and that means as much as to say they'll hang," was the reply.

"All ready, then," came the cool rejoinder of the doomed man, and one of the Vigilantes fired a charge of powder from his pistol into the flank of the horse to make him spring from under the rider.

With a frightened and angry snort the animal bounded forward, and the next instant Black Beard was dangling in the air.

Instantly the men mounted their horses and set off on their return to Prospect City, Red Jenks persuading Gordon Lillie to return with them a few miles, and then take another trail to the mines, which was safer, as the youth refused to go back to Prospect City with him, though strongly urged to do so.

Arriving at the trail which Red Jenks thought it best for him to take, the landlord again urged Gordon Lillie to go back to Prospect City and make it his home.

"I've got no wife or kin, lad, and I'll make you my son, for I like you a deal."

"Come, return with me and be my clerk, and you can get what I have when I pass in my

checks, and you may not have to wait long, either, for life's a mighty onstart in commodity on the plains."

The invitation was well meant, and Gordon Lillie took it so; but he was not anxious to return to Prospect City.

He might get into a wild community where he was going, but he certainly could not get into a worse one he thought.

So he thanked the landlord warmly, told him if luck went against him he would return to him, and with a grasp of the hand from all, and a number of good wishes, he rode off alone on his perilous journey, while the riders who had rescued him from death went on their way to Prospect City, all of them loud in their praises of the plucky youth.

After riding a mile, Gordon Lillie came to a halt.

He had left one of his revolvers, and he remembered to have placed it upon a nail near one of the small port-holes in the cabin.

It was a splendid weapon, and he determined to return and get it.

Then he would go on his way by the trail which he had first started on, for it was shorter, and he was anxious to get to the end of his journey and see what was in store for him.

"If I can only find a gold-mine, and strike it rich, as they say out here, I will return mighty quick and pay Banker Rolston the money he says I stole from the safe, and I think I can clear myself of the accusation, for I was a fool to offer myself as a sacrifice."

So said Gordon Lillie to himself, as he rode on his way back to the cabin where he had so nearly lost his life.

As he drew near he said:

"Those Judge Lynch lawyers, as they call themselves, are little better than the desperadoes they kill, for they had not heart enough to bury that fellow I killed, and left Black Beard hanging on the tree."

"I'll bury them, for they are human beings, at least, bad as they were."

A few moments more, and he rode into the timber.

A number of wolves, feeding upon the body of the dead desperado, ran off with angry yelps at his approach, but it was not their presence there which caused him to come to a sudden halt.

The tree on which Black Beard had been hung was before him; but the man was not there!

CHAPTER XII.

A RENEGADE'S FRIENDSHIP.

THE party under Red Jenks had been gone but a short while from the timber, where they had left Black Beard suspended to a limb, when another band of horsemen rode into the woods.

They were a large party, fully two-score in number, and were a band of red-skins, well mounted, well armed, and in all their war-paint and feathers.

At their head rode a large man, mounted upon a splendid bay horse, and carrying the most approved style of revolvers and rifle.

He also rode on a Mexican saddle which was heavy with silver, and the bridle was also resplendent with precious metal of the same kind.

Although painted like an Indian he was a white man, as his long brown hair and beard plainly showed, and he wore the head-dress of a great chief.

His quick eyes, as they entered the timber from the opposite side to that which the Regulators had departed, fell upon the form of Black Beard swinging from the limb.

Instantly he spurred forward, and halted by the side of the suspended form.

"By Heaven! but he is alive!"

So saying, he called to two of his warriors, and telling them to support the form, he severed the lariat with a blow of his knife.

The neck of the man had not been broken when the horse sprang from under him, and more, the noose had slipped around to the front and failed to choke him to death.

He was, therefore, still breathing; in fact, conscious; and yet, but for the coming of the red-skins, could not have lived long.

Placing the man upon the ground the white chief felt his pulse, ordered water brought from the spring near, and then set to work to revive him, for he was hardly more than conscious and unable to speak or move.

"It is Alfred Chambers, and he shall not die if I can help it, for I owe it to him that I am not now dead," said the chief, speaking to himself rather than to his warriors.

Water was brought from the spring and poured into the mouth of Black Beard, while his

face and neck were bathed by the chief, with a touch as tender as a woman's.

After a few minutes the eyes of Black Beard turned upon the chief, and he said, with great difficulty of articulation:

"Are you reviving me to torture me to death?"

"No, indeed, my dear fellow, for I know you, Alf Chambers."

"You are a white man, I see, but a renegade, as you are in full war-paint."

"I am Roger Reynolds, or rather was, for now I am known as Evil Spirit, a Sioux chief."

"Ah, yes, you are Roger Reynolds, whom the settlers were going to hang, and I got you away from them, and you and your little daughter escaped that night."

"I remember you now, and I helped you then because I felt for your little daughter, though I knew that you deserved hanging."

"I have gone to the bad since, and I am as bad as you were; but I've not been a renegade yet, Roger Reynolds."

"Well, from your present condition, it seems you are in a fair way to become one, for your own race have swung you up, as red-skins never hang a man."

"Yes, I was hanged by Red Jenks and his Regulator band from Prospect City, and but for your coming, ere this I would have been dead."

"We are quits, Reynolds."

"Well, yes; but you must join me, for I have horses and weapons along, and am on a raid among the settlements."

"What say you?"

"As I cannot live among my own people, I may as well turn red-skin, as you offer me the chance."

"Do so; but are you able to get up and move about, for it will set the blood circulating."

"Go to the brook and jump in, as it will do you good."

"Then tell me if it is worth while to take the trail of this Red Jenks and his gang?"

"No, for you'll get only hard knocks, and if you have no more braves than those I see about you, they'll do you up, for they are a hard fighting lot and armed to the teeth."

"I'll let 'em go then; but we must leave here as soon as you are able, as I wish to strike the valley settlement to-night, and it is a long jump from here."

Thus urged, Black Beard arose from the ground, and, following the advice of the renegade chief by a jump into the brook, soon after expressed himself as able to go on with the red-skin band.

A horse, saddle and bridle were given him, and the party rode out of the timber an hour after entering it, and with Black Beard gloating over his escape from death, and vowing revenge upon Red Jenks and those who had helped to hang him.

The ride of the red-skins, under their renegade white chief, to the valley settlement was made, and many a man lost his life in the scene that followed their arrival, while the heavens and prairie were illumined with the glare of burning cabins.

Having completed their red work, the Indian band started off for their mountain fastnesses, loaded with booty and driving a large herd of horses and cattle with them.

As this raid of the red-skins is not a part of my story, I only refer to it incidentally to explain scenes that occurred later in the adventurous life of Gordon Lillie.

When he reached the timber and beheld the lariat hanging to the limb, and Black Beard gone, Gordon Lillie was considerably taken aback.

At first he did not know how to account for the mysterious disappearance of the man, and began to think that the ropes that bound his hands had not been well tied, and he had thus released himself.

He had, however, begun to study signs, and he soon discovered that the rope had been cut.

The noose end of it lay upon the ground, and the other end was still fastened to the tree.

Then he saw the tracks of many hoofs, and as there were few shod ones, he came to the conclusion that those who had visited the place were Indians, and he knew that the Sioux were on the war-path.

Having decided upon this, he followed the trail to the edge of the woods, and noted the direction it took, and counted, as well as he could, the number of horses in the party.

Then he took out a map of the country, one he had drawn himself from other maps, and the information he had gleaned of others, and said, after glancing at it:

"If they keep on the trail they have started, they are going to the valley settlement to attack it."

"Can I not head them off?"

Hastily he returned to the cabin, got his pistol, and, burying the mangled remains of the dead desperado, on which the wolves had been feasting, mounted Black Ben and rode rapidly away from the timber.

The rest and food made Black Ben feel perfectly fresh, and he went along at a swinging gallop which cast the miles behind him rapidly.

The intention of Gordon Lillie was to follow upon the Indian trail, until he was sure they were aiming for the valley settlement, and then to switch off, and try and get there ahead of them.

He knew that it was a dangerous undertaking, and that he knew nothing of the country more than he gleaned from his map.

But he knew about the distance he would have to ride, and he was sure that his splendid horse was equal to the work before him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CAPTIVE.

IT was no easy task for Gordon Lillie to accomplish his good purpose, of warning the settlement of the approach of the red-skin band, and this he soon discovered to his great chagrin and regret.

He followed rapidly on the trail until he was certain that the Indians could not be very far ahead.

Then he slackened his pace and held on until he saw that they took the trail leading toward the settlement marked upon his map.

At once he made a flank movement to the right and urged Black Ben on at a swift pace.

After a ride of a couple of hours he reached a stream that he could not cross, on account of the precipitous bank.

The stream was marked upon his map, but it was not stated that the banks were too steep for crossing except at certain points.

One mark indicating a ford he knew must be miles away from where he then was, and so he dashed away for this point.

It took him a long time to reach it, owing to the nature of the ground, and when he did so the stream was swollen by heavy rains and it was a hard struggle for his gallant horse to get across.

Then he halted one hour for much needed rest, as Black Ben was feeling the strain, and greatly fatigued himself, he soon fell to sleep.

He awoke in ill humor, for he knew that night was not far distant, and the red-skin raiders must certainly be by that time pretty near the settlement while he was many miles away.

But he threw the saddle on Black Ben and once more pressed on.

Night soon settled down, and, unable to find his way in the dark, he reluctantly gave up the attempt and sought a camping-place in some timber.

He built a fire and cooked his supper, and in a morose mood at his failure to warn the settlement, went to sleep, leaving Black Ben to feed and rest at will.

How long he slept he did not know; but he was awakened somewhat suddenly, as he opened his eyes to discover that he was in the hands of red-skins in all their hideous war-paint.

It was a novel experience for the youth, and a startling one.

His foes had seen his flickering fire and had crept upon him while he slept.

Gordon Lillie had not been long enough upon the border to learn wisdom and cunning; but he felt that such experience as he was then undergoing would teach him both, if his life was not suddenly cut short.

The red-skins who had captured him were four in number, and they were the advance couriers of the force under the white chief Evil Spirit.

They bound the youth with rawhide thongs, until they cut into his flesh, and leaving one of their number to guard him, the others went on ahead.

In half an hour Gordon Lillie heard the sound of voices and knew that the rest of the red-skins were coming.

It did not take him long to discover that they were driving cattle, for he heard their cries, and soon after a body of horsemen rode up.

The Indian guard gave a signal, which was answered, and then called out in his Sioux tongue for the chief to approach.

The next moment Evil Spirit rode up, attended by a dozen warriors.

Behind him came the stolen horses, loaded

down with booty, and the drove of horses and cattle followed, while in the rear was a guard of a score of warriors, to beat back any pursuing force.

Wood was thrown upon the fire and Gordon Lillie started as he recognized Black Beard with the chief.

"It's all up with me, for they seem to be his friends," he muttered, and again he wished that he had never gone West.

"By Heaven! it is the boy that got me into my trouble," cried Black Beard, as his eyes fell upon Gordon Lillie.

He had already told Evil Spirit of the youth's fight at the Bonanza Hotel in Prophet City, when he killed his brother, and also of his gallant defense of the cabin against himself and his four companions.

Evil Spirit had admired the boy's pluck, and now said:

"Well, young man, you are in a bad box."

"So it seems, if that man is your friend, and if I am your prisoner."

"Well, this man is my friend, and I saved him from dying at the end a lariat, and you are my prisoner."

"Now what are you doing here?"

"I was on my way to the Colorado mining-camps."

"Well, you'll have to change your plans."

"I expect it, without a choice of what plans I'll have to carry out," was the cool reply.

"Be light on him, chief, for the boy begged for me, I admit, and I'll call it quits between us," said Black Beard.

"You are a better man than I thought you, and I thank you," Gordon Lillie rejoined.

"Oh, yes, I have no desire to kill the plucky boy, so I'll take him along with us," responded Evil Spirit, and he gave a warrior orders to let the youth mount his own horse, but to tie him to him and then take him along with the band.

Gordon breathed more freely, and all through the remainder of the night rode along behind the chief and Black Beard, with an Indian warrior by his side.

The band of red marauders pushed on as rapidly as they could with their booty and cattle, and did not halt until the sun was several hours high.

Then but a short halt was made, and they kept on until late in the afternoon, when they reached the foot-hills of a mountain range, where Evil Spirit halted his warriors to guard the retreat of his pack-horses and cattle from those who might follow.

While a few braves went on at a slower pace toward the Indian village in the mountains, carrying with them the plunder and herds of stock, Evil Spirit and the larger number took up a position in the foot-hills to ambush any pursuers who might be upon their trail.

Among those remaining with the chief was Black Beard, while Gordon Lillie, along with the braves slain in the attack on the settlement, and the wounded, for all were brought along on travois, went on with the party going to the village.

The cattle were tired, as were also the pack-animals, and so they moved slowly up into the mountains.

The warriors had been long in the saddle and they were also worn out, and Gordon noticed that the brave who had him in charge was half-asleep.

He had observed that his bonds were not very secure, for Evil Spirit had had them loosened as he saw that they gave him pain, and so the brave boy set to work to untie them.

After hard work he freed one hand from where it was bound to the horn of the saddle, and soon after released the other, the guard calmly sleeping the while.

This guard was in advance, leading the way to the village, and both his pony and Gordon's horse had walked faster than the others and so had gotten some little distance ahead.

Night was not far distant and the youth determined to make a bold effort to escape.

In his saddle-bags, which had not been robbed, fortunately for him, he had a revolver.

But he cared not to fire upon his guard, knowing that it would at once alarm those in the rear.

"I will try a different plan, and use my revolver only when it is needed," he muttered, and he quietly slipped the weapon out of the saddle-bag and grasped it firmly in his hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FORTUNATE RESCUE.

THE Indian guard still slept serenely, reeling from side to side, but never losing his equilibrium, and at times opening his eyes for a sleepy

glance at his prisoner, whose horse was fastened to the animal he rode.

Raising his revolver, the butt grasped firmly in his hand, Gordon Lillie brought it down with telling force upon the head of the sleeping Sioux guard.

The blow was a severe one, and not a moan escaped the red lips as the warrior fell from his saddle to the ground.

The two horses, startled by the blow and fall, sprung forward; but Gordon Lillie hastily checked them, and unfastening his rein from the bridle of the Indian pony, let him go on ahead, as soon as he had recovered his own weapons which the red-skin had tied to his saddle.

Then he returned and quickly placed the warrior across the back of Black Ben, and led him along at a trot until he came to where he could leave the rocky trail and enter the forest.

Here he hid the Indian among a clump of bushes, and left him, feeling assured that he was not dead, but merely stunned.

Then he mounted Black Ben and rode away at a gallop, just as the drove of pack-horses reached the spot where he had felled the red-skin guard from his saddle.

"It was a close call; but night is not far off, and I guess, Black Ben, we can make it back to the settlements by morning, and they cannot track us by night."

So saying Gordon urged Black Ben on through the heavy timber, bearing to the right, so as to flank not only those he had just left, but also Evil Spirit and his warriors stationed in the foot-hills.

He was riding slowly along a ridge, which led toward a valley, when suddenly he heard hoof-falls coming at a rapid pace.

The timber was full of large bowlders, and instantly he rode behind one, but ere he got out of sight he caught a glance of those whom he wished to avoid.

There were but two of them, and one of these he discovered was a female.

They were coming at a rapid pace, their horses side by side.

It was almost twilight; but he discovered, by peering over the bowlder that the maiden was a captive, for her hands were bound behind her, and there was a bandage over her mouth.

The same look also showed him that they would doubtless dash by him and not discover his presence.

As they drew nearer, still going in a gallop, Gordon took another look.

He saw that they would not see him, and he congratulated himself on this; but the look showed to him that the captive was not an Indian maiden.

A shot from his revolver might be heard by the guards, and he might thus be retaken.

But Gordon Lillie's nature was a fearless one, and he determined to take his chances and try and rescue the girl.

He saw that there were no other red-skins following, and, as the two horses dashed by the bowlder he raised his revolver and fired.

He was fearful of hitting the maiden, should he fire at the brave, so he aimed at the red-skin's horse, and the bullet sunk into his brain.

Down went the animal and he nearly dragged the other horse with him, while he threw his rider heavily.

Instantly Gordon Lillie spurred forward and sprung from his saddle holding the fallen Indian under cover of his revolver.

But the Indian remained motionless, for the fall had stunned him, as he had struck a bowlder with great force.

Then Gordon turned to the girl, whose horse was fast to the fallen animal, and a glance showed him that he was right in his belief that she was not an Indian.

She was dressed in buckskin, the waist, skirt, leggings and moccasins being embroidered in beads, and she wore a head-dress of rare feathers.

Her hair hung down her back below her waist and was of a rich gold-brown color.

She was scarcely over fifteen, and her face, with its fine features and splendid eyes was very striking and handsome.

As she saw who it was who had rescued her, she looked surprised, while Gordon hastily freed her from the bandage over her mouth and cut the thongs that bound her hands behind her.

"What are you, a white man, doing in these mountains?" was the quick query.

"I have just escaped from the band of Evil Spirit, the Sioux chief, and seeing that you were a white girl and a captive, I concluded to try and rescue you," said Gordon, gazing upon the young girl with deep interest, and also amazement at seeing her there in the Indian mountains.

"And you did rescue me; but I don't think Snake Eyes is dead, so you had better tie him," and she motioned to the prostrate red-skin.

"We had better at once fly from here, for he can do us no harm, and my shot may have been heard by the Sioux over on the mountain trail."

"You have nothing to fear from them, for they are my people."

"Your people?"

"Yes."

Gordon was amazed, and replied:

"I refer to the red-skins from whom I escaped, and who are returning from a raid upon the white settlements."

"I understand you, they are my people."

"Your people?"

"Why you are not an Indian?"

"I am a pale-face, the Queen of the Sioux, and my father, Evil Spirit, is their chief."

Gordon felt that he was in dangerous company.

"I've jumped out of the fryingpan into the fire, I fear," he muttered; but he said aloud:

"And you live in the Sioux village?"

"Oh yes, and my father and his people will welcome you, for you have saved me from Snake Eyes, a renegade chief of the Sioux, who is now our worst foe, and he meant to take me to the Pawnees."

"Please tie him, or shall I?"

"Oh no, I'll tie him, and then as you are at home, I'll say good-by."

"You will not leave me—but see, Snake Eyes is moving, and—"

"I'll tie him so that he can't move," and Gordon hastily bound the Indian hand and foot.

Just in time too did he do so, as the red-skin was by no means dead and recovering from the stunning blow glared upon him with a hatred in his eyes that caused Gordon to think he had been well named.

"Now, come with me, and I'll send some braves after Snake Eyes."

"He might escape, so I will remain here while you go."

"You wish to leave me."

Gordon gave the young Sioux Queen credit for wonderful powers of penetration.

"I confess I do not care to remain and be scalped," he said.

"I will protect you, and May Flower will not lie."

"Can you?"

"Said I not I was the Sioux Queen?"

"True."

"And said I not that Evil Spirit, the great chief is my father?"

She seemed hurt by Gordon's doubt of her, and as he felt very tired and was not anxious to go at a venture unless he felt that his life was at stake, he was tempted to remain.

"I was captured by your father's braves, while they were raiding the white settlement, and I was their prisoner until half an hour ago."

"Then I struck the brave, who was guarding me, from his horse, and I had just made my escape when I saw you coming, and the captive of that red-skin."

"Now what will be done with me if I am once more in the power of your people?"

"You will not be harmed, rest assured."

"Then I accept your pledge of safety."

"And will remain here until I return with some braves to take Snake Eyes to the village?"

"Yes."

"You speak straight?" she asked with a smile of half doubt.

"I promise you."

"Then I will go."

"On the trail half a mile away your people are passing, so it would be well to go there for aid, as your village is doubtless some distance off."

"Yes, it is miles away, so I will go to the trail; but remember, do not break your word to May Flower?"

"I will await your return."

Away dashed the young girl, and Gordon Lillie was alone with the renegade Sioux chief.

CHAPTER XV.

RED-SKIN HOSPITALITY.

THE thoughts of Gordon Lillie, when left alone with the renegade Sioux, were not of the pleasantest.

He was a trifle anxious, for he feared that the young queen might have the wish but not the power to save him from the warriors.

If he had killed the Indian guard from whom he had escaped, it would still be worse for him.

"I only hope that red-skin is not dead; but I think I heard his skull crack under my blow," he said, to himself.

Then he turned to Snake Eyes, who was glaring malignantly at him.

"Do you talk English, red-skin?" he asked.

"Yes, Snake Eyes speak pale-face talk."

"Well, what were you running off with the May Flower for?"

"Me love May Flower heap good."

"Me tell her Snake Eyes love her and she laugh at chief."

"Me take her to Pawnee people and make her Snake Eyes' squaw."

"Bad pale-face take May Flower from me."

"I'm right glad I was able to; but what will the Sioux do with you?"

"Kill," was the laconic response.

"You think so?"

"Me know."

"Sioux torture Snake Eyes until he die."

"I'm sorry for you."

"Go with Snake Eyes and he make pale-face brave Pawnee chief."

"I guess not, for I have no desire to turn renegade; but I dare not let you go, as they'd roast me for it."

"Cook Snake Eyes, too."

Gordon really felt sorry for the red-skin, and he was half-tempted to let him go and take the chances.

Then he was tempted to break his word to the Sioux queen and go with the Sioux.

While these thoughts were in his mind, he saw through the gathering gloom May Flower and several warriors approaching at a gallop.

"It's all up with me, I guess," he said, ruefully, and eagerly watched the faces of the braves as they approached.

They gazed upon the youth with the look of men who wanted his scalp, but Gordon felt better over his situation when he discovered that they were thoroughly under the control of May Flower.

The young queen gave a few orders in the Sioux tongue and the braves at once proceeded to place the renegade chief upon one of their ponies and to tie him there.

"Now come with me," said May Flower to Gordon.

He at once mounted his horse and obeyed, following behind her on the trail toward the village.

"Ride near me," she said, when they had gone a short distance.

He urged Black Ben alongside of her Indian pony, which was a splendid animal, white as snow.

"What is your name?" she asked, in her naive way.

"Gordon Lillie."

"Lilly? Why, that is the name of a flower?"

"Yes."

"And a girl's name?"

"Yes, and it is mine."

"Gordon Lillie, you said?"

"Yes."

"I shall call you Lillie, for I like it."

"As you please."

"My name is May Flower."

"So you told me."

"Well, we will be good friends, and my father will make you a young chief because you saved my life."

"I do not care to turn renegade to my people," he said, shortly.

"Renegade?"

"Yes."

"I suppose it is that; but then father has lived a long time among the Sioux, and I was a little girl when he brought me here."

"It is wrong, is it not, for my father to live with the Indians?"

"It is when he wars against his own race."

"Yes, I suppose it is; but the pale-faces treated him very cruelly, and they would have hanged him had he remained, and here he is chief."

Gordon did not care to ask why her father had to leave his own people, and take refuge among the Indians.

As the former associate of Black Beard, Gordon supposed there had been some good reason for the settlers wishing to hang Evil Spirit, the white chief of the Sioux, but this he very wisely kept to himself.

After a ride of several miles the village of the Sioux came in view. It was well located for defense, the hills about it being only here and there marked with trails, and these passes guarded by a few warriors, a large force could be kept at bay.

May Flower gave a signal as she approached the pass, and it was answered at once, and the two rode on, Gordon being unable to detect just where the Indian sentinel was.

Reaching the top of the hill the camp-fires of

the village came into view, scores in number and lighted up the large valley.

A river wound its way through the valley, and upon either side of it were the tepees of the Sioux, and Gordon saw that there were many of them.

A carrier had arrived telling of the coming of Evil Spirit, with large herds of horses and cattle, and quantities of plunder, and the Sioux were wild with delight.

"You say that the Indian who captured you was one of your people?" asked Gordon of May Flower, as the two rode down the vale toward the village.

"Yes, he was a young chief and a cruel one."

"He tried to get my father to let him marry me, and was refused, for I hate him."

"Then he was jealous of another chief whom my father liked, and so he killed him and had to fly from the village."

"He is a Pawnee chief now, for he went to join the Pawnees, and to-day, as I was riding along the ridge, looking for birds of light plumage, that I might get their feathers to trim a new skirt, I was surprised by him, seized and bound before I could resist, for he is a very powerful man."

"Then he tied me to my pony, put that buckskin bandage over my mouth, and was running away with me when you saved me."

"Oh, how glad I am that you did save me, and it was good of you too, when you were trying to escape yourself, and I'll never forget you for it."

Her voice and manner proved how deeply in earnest she was, and Gordon felt glad that he had acted as he had.

They had now reached the village, and the red-skins, braves, squaws and children followed on the heels of the young queen as she rode toward the tepee of her father, situated upon a slope that commanded a view of the entire village.

They wondered at the presence of the pale-face with their queen, and many angry glances were cast upon him as they went along.

But the young girl did not deign to make any explanation, and conducted Gordon on to the tepee of her father.

It was a very large one, with others half surrounding it, and they showed that Evil Spirit, though living in an Indian camp was fond of his comfort.

As they reached the tepee May Flower sprang to the ground and bade Gordon to dismount.

Then she turned to the mass of Indians and said:

"My people, this white brave is our friend, for he rescued me from Snake Eyes, the Sioux renegade chief who had made me a prisoner, and was carrying me to the Pawnees."

"The pale-face will dwell in my father's tepee until he comes."

Gordon did not know what was said, but he discovered that the wrath of the Sioux seemed appeased by the words of their queen, and many, after a close scrutiny of him, walked away, greatly to his relief.

Then he was led into the larger tepee, and was surprised to find out how comfortable it was, for it contained rudely-made chairs, a table, some shelves filled with books, and a cot, while bear and buffalo robes covered the floor.

A large fire was then built by some young boys in front of the tepee, and a number of squaws and braves came up with food for the stranger who had saved their queen from the renegade chief, Snake Eyes.

The dread that Gordon felt at going to the Indian village faded away under the hospitality shown him by the red-skins; but yet there were many who would have been glad to have swung his scalp upon their lodge-pole, and young warriors eyed him with angry and jealous eyes, when they felt that he had rescued their young queen from danger.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PRISONER GUEST.

GORDON LILLIE had just finished his supper, with May Flower, and he really enjoyed it immensely, when the head of the plundering column came into the village.

The large number of horses and cattle were driven to the lower end of the valley to graze along with the ponies and stock of the Indians already there, and the pack-horses were led to the medicine tepee to store the plunder until it should be distributed by Evil Spirit to the people.

The renegade captive was also taken to the Medicine Lodge, and he was followed by a wild

mob, hooting at him and heaping cruel words upon him.

The squaws slapped his face and the children struck him with sticks; but Snake Eyes uttered no word or cry, and walked on his way with the guards, who had dismounted upon reaching the village.

Once in the medicine tepee he was safe from intrusion, and it must have been a great relief to him, though he could not but know what his fate would be.

Gordon Lillie was greatly interested in the scene, but could not but feel sorry for the renegade Sioux, as he could readily realize how he might have been in his place, as far as cruel treatment by the red-skins was concerned.

He retired early, sleeping in the tepee of Evil Spirit, as May Flower bade him do.

The din of the Indian camp, kept up until a late hour of the night, and his strange surroundings, did not disturb his slumbers, and he did not wake up until the sun streamed into his face the next morning.

He sprang to his feet half in alarm, hardly realizing where he was at first.

But it soon came to him that he was a prisoner, nothing more nor less, in the Sioux village of Evil Spirit, the white chief.

He went out of the tepee and saw May Flower, and she greeted him pleasantly and invited him to eat the breakfast which she had cooked.

Soon after there was a hubbub in the village, down at the lower end, and Evil Spirit appeared in sight.

"I sent a warrior to my father last night, to tell him that you were here and what I owed to you," she said, as though to reassure Gordon.

The young man made no reply, but watched the coming of Evil Spirit.

Would he give to him the same welcome his daughter had?

Would he sanction her act in bringing him to the village of the Sioux?

Gordon felt that the moment of greatest peril was upon him, and he asked:

"Did I kill the Indian warrior who was my guard?"

"No; he was badly hurt and lies over in his tepee, but the medicine-man says that he will not die."

Gordon Lillie gave a sigh of relief, and continued to gaze upon the coming chief.

Evil Spirit was not alone.

He was attended by Black Beard and two Indian chiefs, and they were coming at a canter toward the tepee.

The red-skins were surprised, without doubt, to see with their chief, and not bound as a prisoner, another pale-face, and they cast wondering glances at each other.

But if Evil Spirit knew what they were thinking about he did not notice it, and dashing up to his tepee, sprang to the ground, telling Black Beard to do so also.

He strode at once toward his daughter and kissed her, at the same time uttering some words of endearment to her in a low tone.

With all his sins, Roger Reynolds the White Renegade loved his daughter.

In a few rapidly-spoken words she told him of her capture by Snake-Eyes, and rescue by Gordon Lillie, and he seemed greatly surprised at her escape.

Then he turned to Gordon and said:

"So, young sir, you preferred to take your chances and escape from me?"

"I certainly did, sir," was the reply.

"Well, I am not sorry, as had you not done so I would have lost my child, the only being on earth I care for, and all I care to live for."

"You have done nobly, young man, and I am your friend; my red people are your friends, for they love their queen."

"You are a noble fellow, and must become one of my people, as our friend here, Black Beard, is to do."

"No, I shall never be a renegade to my own race, and I am surprised that such men as you and Black Beard are, should become the foes of your own people," boldly said Gordon Lillie.

"Boy, you do not know what has driven me to be what I am."

"Guiltless of no crime, I was accused of the worst, hounded down by those I had befriended, and at last would have been hanged like a dog had I not fled for my life."

"I brought my daughter with me and found refuge here, and here I am all-powerful."

"Ah, but it was sweet revenge for me to strike my foes, and they will not soon forget Evil Spirit the White Renegade."

The man spoke rapidly and with much bitterness, and his words told Gordon that he had suffered much.

still the youth could not uphold his act in siding with the red-skins against the whites in their cruel way.

"You could have gone elsewhere, and found a home," he said.

"Don't preach to me, boy, for I am what I am."

"But you are welcome to a home here, and some day, when we move our village, you can return to the settlements, but not before."

"You are my guest, and yet you are a prisoner, for you shall be constantly under the eye of my young men."

"Don't attempt to escape, for it will cause you trouble, perhaps worse; but wait until I move my village, when I do not care about you going."

Such was the advice given Gordon by the chief, and the youth understood by his words that he was, though the guest of the renegade, also a prisoner.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EVIL SPIRIT'S PLOT.

THOUGH Gordon Lillie had listened attentively to the advice of the Evil Spirit, he did not intend to follow it, for he made up his mind to escape at the first chance.

But, to do this, he must accept his situation pleasantly, and seem to be content with his lot.

Had he not had ambition and aims in life, and had the Sioux not been at war with the whites, he might have been content to settle down into the wild life they led.

But he would not turn renegade, and unless he did escape he certainly would be dwelling among a people who were at war with his own race.

He asked May Flower incidentally, how often the Indians changed their village, and learned that the one where they then were had been their home for five years, and it was such a good one, so well protected, that it would not be broken up unless settlers and soldiers came nearer to them.

May Flower was constantly with the young prisoner, for she seemed to have taken a wonderful fancy to him, until a word from Black Beard to Evil Spirit, caused the chief to forbid her going with Gordon.

Black Beard had views of his own, regarding the young girl, and he at once put the chief on his guard in a most cunning way.

"Your young braves are jealous of the boy," he said, "and fear that if May Flower loves him she may run off with him."

"Ah! I had not thought of that, for she is but a child."

"Still, you have had offers for her hand from numerous braves."

"Yes."

"I think there is a feeling against the youth, where May Flower is concerned, and she certainly is deeply interested in him."

"I believe you are right, Black Beard, so I will forbid her going with the boy so much."

"It would be best, for it only angers the warriors."

"True."

"But do you expect to spend your days here the rest of your life, as chief of these red-skins?"

"I hope not, and I'll let you into a secret and get you to help me."

"I will do so, you may depend."

"I believe you; but you must become an Indian."

"I'll do it, for what matters it."

"I will make you a medicine-chief, as you have studied medicine, and this will give you a chance to be constantly in the woods and mountains, pretending to hunt for healing herbs; but the truth is, Black Beard, I believe there is gold in the mountains, and in fact I know there is."

"Gold!" and the eyes of Black Beard sparkled with avaricious delight.

"You see the heavy bands of gold that May Flower wears?"

"Yes, are they gold?"

"Solid gold, and she found it in a pocket in the mountains."

"The red-skins call her *Pa-te-la-ka*, the Gold Queen, as she has been most successful in finding these gold pockets."

"Well?"

"I wish you to prospect, and if you strike it rich we will go shares."

"When we have laid up a fortune, we can go from here back to civilization."

"Good! I am with you, and I beg that you will not give your beautiful child to any of these red-skins, chief."

"Do you think I am a fool?"

"No, but some of them expect to win her."

"That does not mean that they shall do so."

"Oh no, I am not going to sacrifice my child, Black Beard, not even to you, for I know that you hope to win her."

"No, drop that idea and we'll be friends; but do not make us foes by trying to win my child."

"We'll find a fortune and go back to civilization to enjoy it, and May can marry some fine man and be happy."

"I have educated her, and she is not ignorant of the world, as you might think."

"Keep her away from that boy and I will be content," growled Black Beard, who evidently did not like the words of Evil Spirit.

"I will see to that, Black Beard; but now let me take you to the Medicine Lodge and make you chief, and fortunately our head medicine-man died a few months ago and you can step into his place."

"My people will not grumble, for you have done some good work with the wounded since you came here."

Then the two left the cabin and soon after Black Beard was installed as medicine-chief of the village.

Evil Spirit took an early opportunity of speaking with May Flower regarding Gordon Lillie, and to his surprise he found her in a very determined mood to have her own way.

"Why cannot I go with him, father?" she asked.

"Because the chiefs do not like it."

"You are my father?"

"Yes, but you are their queen."

"I do not care for any of the young chiefs."

"Nor do I wish you to."

"I wouldn't be here, had it not been for Lillie."

"True; but you must not go with him as you have been doing."

"Why not?"

"I do not wish you to do so, May."

May Flower turned her pretty head and said:

"Then let him leave the village and go back to his people."

"I dare not."

"Why?"

"He would lead a military force upon us from the forts."

"I don't believe he would."

"Well, I'll not risk it, and you must keep away from him."

"But I love him."

"For shame! have you told him so?"

"No, but I may do so."

"Has he told you he loved you?"

"No, but I hope that he does."

Evil Spirit was nonplused, and then he grew angry.

"You know my wishes, so see that you do not disregard them," and he turned away.

Then he retraced his steps and asked:

"Have you found any more gold-pockets in the mountains?"

"I have."

"Rich ones?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"Well, keep up your search for them, but do not speak of there being gold in these mountains to that boy."

"He don't know it."

"See that he does not; but you keep up your gold-hunting, and when you have found a large sum, I'll tell you a secret."

"Tell me now," said May Flower, who had all the curiosity of her sex.

"Well, when we get rich enough we will go back to the East, to the cities, and live."

"I'd like that, though I do not dislike this wild life," and May was lost in deep meditation, and her father left her.

Soon after she went straight to the tepee which Evil Spirit had given to Gordon Lillie to occupy.

"Lillie?" she called out, addressing him by his last name, which she liked best.

"Yes, May," and Gordon came out, rigged up in full Indian togery, which he had adopted since coming to the village, for his own clothes were much the worse for wear.

"Lillie, father says that I must not go with you, that the young warriors do not like it, and it makes them jealous."

"I suppose I have to obey, but I do not wish to, and so we can meet in the mountains, at the spring that I showed you."

"Be careful that you are not followed there, and watch for me when I go, or if you start first any day, I'll keep watch and come soon after."

"May it not get you into trouble, May?"

"I don't know, and I don't care much, for I love you, Lillie, and I will see you as often as I can."

She turned on her heel at this and walked back to her tepee, knowing no shame at her confes-

sion, for her ignorance of the world caused her not to understand that it was wrong for a woman to first confess her love for a man.

Gordon Lillie blushed like a school-girl at her words; but they did not seem to displease him, for he was deeply interested in the fair young Gold Queen.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RENEGADE SIOUX.

THE wound on the head of the renegade Sioux, Snake Eyes, had been rather a severe one, for the fall against the rocks had very nearly crushed his skull in.

So it was some time before he recovered sufficiently for the red-skins of the village to feel that they could enjoy torturing him.

Black Beard had taken good care of the wound, and was winning him back to health and strength again, and, as none of the wounded braves had died under his hands, he had won great favor in the eyes of the red-skins as a medicine-man.

Evil Spirit had distributed the plunder, the horses and the cattle captured, among the families of the village, taking good care to add to the comfort of his own quarters, and so all was joy among the Sioux, as the settlers had not continued the pursuit of their foes, after their disastrous raid, while, as is generally the case, there were not soldiers enough upon the border at the forts, to make a move upon the stronghold in the mountains.

So matters stood when one day Snake Eyes was led forth to be tortured.

To the surprise of Gordon Lillie, the renegade asked Evil Spirit to let him speak to him.

The chief was surprised, but granted the request, and Gordon approached the Indian, where he stood, securely bound, with every eye upon him.

He stood erect, fearless and defiant, showing no sign of dread at what was before him.

As Gordon approached he said in fair English, and in a low tone:

"The Evil Spirit is the foe of his people, and the Black Beard is one, too."

"You are no renegade, and you will escape when you can."

"I loved the pale-faces, for they were good to me, and I killed my brother Sioux chief because he meant to make the May Flower his squaw."

"I fled to the Pawnees. They are at peace with the pale-faces and their friends."

"I came back to capture the May Flower, because I loved her, and I would have taken her to the Pawnees, where I am a great chief."

"While a prisoner in the medicine tepee, I heard the chiefs in council say that they would go with a large band against the Pawnee village of Snake Eyes."

"They will go when the moon comes again, and they will kill the Pawnees, the friends of the pale-faces, and destroy their village."

"I have spoken, so let the young white brave escape from the Sioux village."

"Let him go to the far river where is the village of the Pawnees and warn them of danger."

"Let the young white brave tell the Pawnees how their chief, Snake Eyes died, and they will be his friend and the friends of his people."

"The Snake Eye has spoken."

As he ceased speaking Snake Eyes stood erect, and faced his enemies.

Then Gordon Lillie said:

"I will do as the Snake Eyes asks."

A proud look of triumph came over the face of the Indian chief, as Gordon Lillie turned away, and Evil Spirit who was growing restless under the long talk of the Sioux, called out to the youth:

"What had the red-skin to tell you?"

"He told me to watch how he died, and if I ever saw any of his adopted tribe, the Pawnees, to tell them that he was a great chief," answered Gordon.

"We will see if he maintains his words."

"Warriors, let the renegade Sioux be tortured."

At the command of the chief Gordon would have walked away and escaped the sight that was to follow.

But Evil Spirit called out to him:

"You must remain, young man."

"Do not let the red-skins see that you fear to behold a man's torture."

"I fear nothing; but I am not so brutal as to enjoy seeing a man die," was the response, and Gordon turned to May Flower and asked:

"Will you remain?"

"I must, for those people must never think I dread seeing suffering," was the low response.

Gordon Lillie bit his lips as though angry; but he remained and witnessed the diabolical

torture heaped upon the unfortunate Evil Eyes, and over and again wished that he had allowed him to escape when he was running off with May Flower.

But Evil Eyes smiled through all his torture.

Not a cry was wrung from his lips, and his face wore a defiant smile until his worst enemies in the tribe admired his wonderful pluck and pronounced him a great chief.

At length even Indian human nature could stand no more, and with the same defiant smile upon his lips, the life of the brave chief left the body, his death song being chanted to the last breath.

Then Gordon Lillie turned away and went to his tepee.

He had food for thought.

He had not made the slightest effort to escape thus far, in the weeks that he had been in the Sioux village.

Perhaps it was the presence of May Flower that prevented his thoughts from turning upon an attempt to escape, and he had seemed almost contented with his lot.

But the cruelty of the Sioux, their torture of Snake Eyes, and the words of warning that the chief had given him, set him to thinking.

The Pawnees were the friends of the white people, and a raid upon their village by Evil Spirit and a large band of warriors meant a retreat through the pale-face settlements, with murder and ruin to follow in their path.

It was his duty to warn the friendly Pawnees, and it was his duty to warn the settlement.

He must not longer remain in the Sioux village, but be at work.

Then his thoughts turned upon another fair face, one fairer than was May Flower's.

He had not forgotten Ruby Rolston, and his determination to clear up the cloud that hung over him.

She had won his boyish love, and it was not an easy matter to drive her from his thoughts.

"I will make my escape from here, and I'll set about a plot to do so at once," he said firmly, and that day he began to plot and plan to carry out his determination.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRISONER'S PLOT.

THAT Gordon Lillie was nothing more than a prisoner he had not doubted; but when he began to watch his watchers, he quickly discovered that he was under the closest scrutiny in every move that he made.

Before he had decided to escape without longer delay, he was hardly conscious that the young braves whom he met at all points in his wanderings, were really watching him.

Now he was sure of it.

He had met May Flower at the spring several times, but he had not supposed that it was known, until the day after the death of the renegade Sioux chief it was proven to him.

He met a mounted brave down the valley, and watching his movements saw that he was following him.

Arriving at the spring he saw that the brave moved to a position between him and the exit from the valley, as though to head him off should he attempt to escape by any of the passes.

Soon after his arrival there, May Flower came and threw herself down near the log upon which he was seated.

She was happy in being near him, and was content to remain silent until he spoke.

"May Flower, do you know that we are watched?" he asked.

"No."

"It is true, and if you will be on the watch you will discover it."

"I will keep my eyes open in future."

"The braves whom you must meet in coming here, are spies upon us."

"I should not wonder if they were."

"I think that they are keeping an eye on me to prevent my escape."

"Yes, and to tell my father that we meet here."

"Then let us not do so again, for it might cause us both trouble."

"I will do as you ask, Lillie, but it is hard, for I do so love to be with you."

"And I am glad to have you with me, May; but the truth is this wild life does not suit me."

"Why do you not leave it, then?"

"How can I?"

"Escape."

"But how?"

"Oh, you can find a way, for your horse is in the valley, and your saddle and bridle not far away, as you know."

"I can get your weapons for you, and leave

them in your tepee, with a bag of food, and you can paint your face and go anywhere at night, while if you are spoken to, you know enough Sioux to reply."

"But it is no easy task to get by the guards in the passes."

"There is only one at each pass, and coming from the village he would not suspect you, and you would have the advantage; but beyond, in the foot-hills, my father keeps a number of Indian scouts, and you must be careful to avoid them."

"When will you go, Lillie?"

He was almost miffed at the cool manner that she received his plans of escape in, and said:

"Two nights from now."

"Very well, I will meet you at this spring two hours after nightfall."

"You, May Flower?"

"Yes."

"But you must take no risks."

"I will take the same that you do."

"But why?"

"I am going with you."

"May Flower!"

"It is true."

"No, no, you cannot mean it."

"But I do."

"You would desert your father?"

"Yes, I would desert any one for you, for I love you, Lillie."

Gordon Lillie was wholly taken aback.

He was under a man's age, though certainly a man in looks, actions and nerve.

He did not love May Flower, much as he liked her.

Her love for him worried him, and he hardly knew what to say or do.

For some moments he made no reply, but then said:

"Why, May Flower, you would be unhappy away from your father."

"Not with you, Lillie."

"I have no home, no place to go, no money, and will have to go to the mining-camps and dig for gold."

"Gold!" she said, quickly.

"Yes."

"My father says that gold will buy every happiness."

"It will buy many."

"And you want gold?"

"Yes, I wish to make a fortune."

"What would you do with gold?"

"I wish a large sum to take back to one person and give it to him."

"I want gold to buy me a home and live in comfort."

"Lillie."

"Yes, May Flower."

"I have a secret I have not told my father."

"Take me with you, and I will tell you the secret."

"Ah, May Flower, I do not see how I can take you with me."

"I am going."

"You must not do so, May."

"I will, for I love you, and I will go with you far from here."

"When we have gone I will tell you my secret and then you will be happy."

"Two nights from now I will be ready, and we will meet here."

"Yes," he said, mechanically, and May arose and walked away.

Gordon was in a quandary.

He did not know what to do, for he could not take the girl with him.

At last he said:

"No, she must remain here, for I cannot take her."

"I will go alone."

"But what can this secret be she speaks of?"

"She started so when I spoke of gold, and she certainly wears large bands of it."

"I wonder if there can be a mine in these mountains, and she knows of it."

"Well, all I can do is to depart alone, and I will do so this very night."

"After I have gone she won't care, and she will soon forget me."

"Now to return to my tepee and get ready."

He retraced his way to the village, noticing that he was still watched, and going by the herd of horses belonging to Evil Spirit, he noticed Black Ben feeding among them.

"You have had a good rest, old horse, so will be ready for a journey, I guess," he said, as he passed near the horses, and noted his saddle, bridle and other traps under a shelter in a clump of timber along with those of the chief.

Sauntering back to his tepee, Gordon Lillie was glad to find his rifle and revolvers already there.

That they were there proved that May Flower was in earnest.

He had also found some provisions which she had placed there for him, and some paint with which to daub his face.

He was accustomed to eat his meals with Evil Spirit, Black Beard, and May Flower, so when he went to his supper the young girl gave him a quiet look which he understood.

After a while she found a chance to say to him:

"I will get more food to-morrow."

"No one suspects you, and the guard does not watch you at night."

His conscience smote him as he thought of her disappointment when she would find him gone on the morrow, but he felt that he was doing his duty, and so steeled his heart against any tenderness.

He realized fully all the dangers he would have to face, that a false step would be fatal to him; but he had made up his mind, and if death would be the end he would not shrink from it, for he saw, now that the renegade chief had warned him, that Evil Spirit and his warriors were getting ready for a raid.

"I will warn the Pawnees and the settlers," he said to himself, "and if I do it will repay me for all I may have to suffer."

Fortunately for Gordon Lillie the night came on raining, and he was glad to see the red-skins were driven to their tepees at an early hour.

CHAPTER XX.

THE VENTURE.

WHEN in his tepee Gordon Lillie looked to his weapons.

There was light enough, from the blazing campfire without, for him to see how to put his rifle and revolver in good condition and load them.

Then he looked at the provisions which May Flower had left for him, and saw that there was sufficient to last him a couple of days.

When he felt assured that the camp was in deep repose, he prepared to start upon his perilous venture.

He was glad to see that the rain had put the fire almost out, and strapping a blanket about his weapons, and enveloping himself in a huge buffalo-robe, he crept out of his tepee.

He made his way down to the river-bank, and followed it to the spot where the Evil Spirit's horses were.

The animals were grouped together, standing with heads bent in the pelting rain.

A low call brought Black Ben to him, and he led the animal to the shelter where the saddles and bridles were.

He soon had Black Ben saddled, for it was easy work to pick out his belongings among the others, and mounting he rode away toward a mountain pass, which he knew was seldom used.

He had slung his rifle at his back, under the buffalo-robe, and had his pistols in his belt ready for use.

He nerved himself for what was before him, and he was determined to meet it boldly.

The rain still came down heavily; but the buffalo-robe over his shoulders, for he had cut a hole in the center and thrust his head through, protected him thoroughly, for it was a very large one.

Up to the pass he went, for he had twice been there before with May Flower.

There was a wickiup he knew at the pass, under which the Indian sentinels found shelter, and here he knew he would find the guard.

He did not wish to shoot him, for the shot would alarm the village half a mile away, and he knew not the country beyond, so he could not ride rapidly and might be overtaken.

"I'll not fire unless I have to," he said.

Arriving at the rocky pass, he saw, by a flickering fire, the little brush shelter and the red-skin guard seated under it, his head bowed upon his knees.

Gordon knew that he did not dare trust to his being sound asleep, and so he rode up boldly to take his chances.

The Indian was up in an instant when he heard the hoof-fall, but seemed relieved when he saw a horseman, approaching from the valley.

"Who is it?" he said, in a loud voice; and Gordon, in his best Sioux, replied, giving the name of a young brave:

"Talla-ha-ta-ka."

"Where goes the White Buffalo?" asked the sentinel.

Gordon had now reached the side of the In-

* White Buffalo.

dian guard, who was suspecting no danger to himself from a fellow-brave, as he believed the youth to be, and so had not time to dodge the blow dealt him on the head with the butt of the rifle, which the youth drove forward with great force full against his temple.

The red-skin dropped in his tracks as though a bullet had pierced his brain, and Gordon Lillie quickly dismounted, seized his bow and arrows, his buffalo-robe, and the provisions he had there.

Then taking the Indian pony of the guard in lead, he mounted Black Ben and rode on down the pass.

In the darkness and rain he had to trust to Black Ben alone, and the noble animal went forward at a slow and cautious pace.

The rain had caused the streams to rise, and here and there Gordon found Black Ben and the Indian pony nearly washed off their feet.

But they held on bravely, and after several hours reached the open plain.

The rain still poured down, and Gordon urged the horses into a canter, congratulating himself upon not having run upon any of the red-skin scouts that he knew were in the foothills.

"I could not have had a better night for it," he muttered to himself, as he sped along.

At last the rain ceased falling, and an hour before dawn he came upon some timber, where he halted.

He knew that he had a very long start of the red-skins and could afford to rest for a few hours and dry out his robes and blankets, which were a heavy weight for his horse, in addition to his own weight.

He had brought along a bundle of pine knots, and did not take him long to make a fire, when he had satisfied himself that there was no one in the little thicket but himself.

Before the blazing logs he hung his buffalo-ropes and blankets, and managed to dry his clothing while he sat napping near the fire.

Dawn broke and he soon had a breakfast, while his horses were lariatied out to feed on the grass which grew abundantly near by.

His clothes had dried, and also his robes and blankets, by an hour after sunrise, and he made up a pack which he strapped upon the back of the Indian pony, relieving Black Ben of as much weight as he could.

Then having studied his map, and gotten the locality of the Pawnee village in his mind, he mounted Black Ben and started on his journey, while he could hardly keep from shouting with joy at his escape from the village of Evil Spirit, the White Renegade.

Still he could not but feel for the sorrow which he knew May Flower would suffer when he knew that he had deserted her after all her kindness to him.

"But what else could I do?" he asked himself, over and over again, as he rode along at as brisk a pace as he dared urge his horses.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WARNING.

GORDON LILLIE did not spare his horses, but pressed on as rapidly as he dared force them, for he feared that Evil Spirit might, in following him, decide to also make his raid that much sooner, against the Pawnees.

In various ways he tried to hide his trail, by following the examples of the red-skins, and felt convinced that he had done so.

He knew about the direction of the Pawnee village, and that it was something over a hundred miles distant from the range in which the Sioux camp was located.

He halted again late in the afternoon for food and rest for his horses and himself, and managed to get a couple of hours' sleep which refreshed him greatly.

The horses also laid down to rest after eating a good meal, so were ready for the flight again when Gordon once more started on the way.

The hours of the night went by slowly, and the brave youth held on in one direction, feeling that he must be on a course that would not take him far out of the way.

Before dawn another halt was made for several hours, and then he pushed on once more, the horses now showing signs of fatigue, especially the Indian pony.

Toward noon he came to hill lands, with heavy forests, and to his delight he saw a column of smoke curling up above the trees.

He was well aware that he was by no means out of danger, that he was in a part of the country where he was likely to meet at any time both white and red raiders.

The Border Bravos, a band of white robbers infested the country, he knew, and also there

were lawless gangs of men prowling about, while Indians were not to be trusted, even the Pawnees, if they thought they could do an act of wrong and not be found out.

The smoke might come from a camp of honest men, a settler's cabin, a party of Pawnee hunters or from a prowling lot of white robbers.

He had to be cautious, and so he approached the timber cautiously, hitched his horses, and went on foot to reconnoiter.

To his delight he saw a settler's cabin, and a man working in a field.

Calling to him, he saw him spring for rifle, and take shelter behind a tree.

"I am no enemy, sir, but a friend," he called out and advanced toward him.

The man still was cautious, and asked, as he still kept his position by the tree:

"Who are you?"

"I am one who has just escaped from the Sioux."

"Are they here in this neighborhood?" was the anxious inquiry.

"Not now, but they may be, and I am anxious to find the Pawnee village."

"It is twenty miles to the westward, pard, in the hills; but what are you going there for?"

"The Pawnees are at peace with the whites, and I know that Evil Spirit and his warriors are going to attack their village, so I wish to warn them, and the settlements too, for the Sioux will retreat this way."

"That's good of you; but if the Pawnees give 'em a good battle, they'll not come this way but retreat to their mountains again."

"You say you have escaped from the Sioux?"

"Yes, night before last."

"You are a plucky young fellow, I can tell you; but where did they capture you?"

"Months ago, on their last raid upon the settlements."

"I was on my way to the mines, and got picked up by them on their retreat to the mountains."

"Curse them! it's a wonder they did not kill you, for old Evil Spirit, they say, is a white renegade and hates his whole race."

"He is a white man."

"And they left a red trail behind them on their last raid."

"They did, indeed; but can you give me a fresh horse to ride on to the Pawnee village?"

"Yes, and a good one, while I will go along the line of settlements and put the settlers on their guard; but you must be cautious about going to the Pawnee camp, for though friendly to us, there are many young bucks who would be only too glad to catch you in a trap."

"I'll be careful; but now show me the way, please, for I must lose no time, as I believe Evil Spirit is even now on the war-path."

"I'll get my horses while you bring yours to the cabin, and I'll have my wife cook dinner for you," and the man went toward his humble home while Gordon returned for his horses.

He found a warm welcome from the settler's wife and half-grown family, and a good dinner was at once set before him, while a boy of fourteen took charge of Black Ben and the pony, for the two animals were very tired.

An hour after reaching the cabin Gordon was mounted upon a wiry mustang and riding rapidly toward Pawnee camp, while the settler also well mounted was going in the opposite direction to warn the settlers of impending danger.

Determined to reach the Pawnee camp before night, Gordon Lillie rode at a swift gallop, and, following the directions given him by the settler arrived in the neighborhood of the village of Pawnees while the sun was yet an hour high.

He suddenly came upon a band of young bucks, and holding his hands above his head rode up to them.

"Do you speak English?" he asked, as they surveyed him critically.

"Yes, me Spotted Horse."

"Me speak English good," said a young brave of twenty.

"I wish to see your chief."

"My father, Big Spotted Horse, in village."

"He big chief."

"Lead me to him at once."

"Come," said the young brave, and the whole party set off for the village, which was situated among the hills a mile away.

Other Indians were met on the way, some gathering wood, others lazily wandering about the woods, and a few hunting.

All gazed at the white stranger with curiosity, and many looked as though they would like to have a chance to kill him.

But Gordon showed no sign of fear, nodded to the Indians as he passed them, and all fell in

line behind the party of bucks who were acting as an escort to the stranger.

Reaching the camp, Gordon saw that his coming created considerable excitement; but he was led at once to the tepee of the chief then in charge, Big Spotted Horse.

The old chief did not speak English, but his son interpreted all that Gordon Lillie had to tell, the other young braves not having entered the tepee.

Big Spotted Horse was alarmed at the news brought him, and a signal for a council of the chiefs and prominent warriors was at once given.

All hastened to the tepee of Big Spotted Horse, the council-fire was lighted and the story that the young white man had to tell was told over again, from his capture by the Sioux to his escape.

There were a number who understood English fairly, and some few spoke it well, and they listened how the Sioux chief, Snake Eyes, had been put to death, and Gordon showed them the head-dress of the dead Indian, which he had secretly obtained possession of after his talk with him.

The story of the youth was repeated over and over again in the Pawnee tongue until all present knew it by heart.

Then there was a low and earnest talk among the warriors, and gray heads asked the advice of the pale-face youth, who told them in a few words what he deemed the best plan to beat off their foes.

This was to send out three parties of braves, a few miles apart, with scouts ahead of them, to report the coming of the Sioux.

Then in case of an attack of either party the other two could hasten to the rescue.

Gordon also gave them an estimate of the number of warriors that the Sioux could bring to the attack, and how they were armed, and he volunteered to go along with one of the parties and join in the battle, telling them that not only would Evil Spirit be the chief in command, but another renegade white man, Black Beard, would also be a leader of their foes.

Big Spotted Horse at once decided to follow the plan of Gordon Lillie, and orders were given to call the warriors to arms, to heed the warning of the daring white stranger who had come to befriend them.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN INDIAN BATTLE.

THERE was another suggestion given Big Spotted Horse by Gordon Lillie which the old chief was glad to follow.

This was that an Indian runner should be sent to the fort to tell the commandant the situation, and another one sent along the line of the settlements to further put them on their guard.

Two Pawnee horsemen, young braves who spoke English well, were at once started upon these errands, and by dawn the next morning the Indians were prepared for their Sioux enemies.

Big Spotted Horse had taken up a position with a couple of hundred braves some ten miles from his village, at a point where he expected the Sioux would come, with half a hundred warriors within a few miles upon either side, ready to support him, when the attack should come.

Scouts had also been sent out ahead, and then all was ready for the fray.

The day passed away, the night followed, and then another day, and the Pawnees began to think that their foes would not come.

But knowing that they would not appear by day, Gordon had ridden back to the settler's cabin to get Black Ben, feeling that he was rested by that time.

He found a camp of settlers about the cabin, some two score in number, all well mounted and armed, while they awaited the coming of the Sioux.

The settler, Harvey Reed, introduced Gordon as the young man who had escaped from the Sioux, and had brought them warning of the intended attack of Evil Spirit, and most warmly was he welcomed by all and praised for his pluck.

He told, in a modest way, of his adventures since coming West, and became quite a hero among the settlers, all telling him to make their homes as his own, whenever he cared to come their way.

Having gotten Black Ben, Gordon Lillie left to return to the Pawnee camp, as he had promised Big Spotted Horse he would do, and two young men accompanied him to bring back any news they might glean of the coming of the Sioux.

It was just dark when Gordon and his two

companions reached the camp of Big Spotted Horse, and half an hour after an Indian scout flashed up bringing the information that the Sioux were coming.

They had camped for the day in the hills, ten miles away, and were moving toward the Pawnee village on a line that would bring them near the position of Big Spotted Horse.

Word was at once sent to the smaller bands to put them on their guard, and one of the settlers started back to join his companions at Harvey Reed's cabin and give them the information, the other remaining with the Indians to see the result of the attack.

Two hours passed away, and then out on the plains a long dark line was visible, looking like a huge snake crawling over the prairie.

The Sioux coming as they did showed that they were not expecting an ambush, but, on the contrary, expected to surprise the Pawnee village.

And, but for Gordon Lillie they would have done so, throwing into the surprised village a larger force than the Pawnees could have rallied to defend themselves with.

Slowly they came, and, as they neared the gap in the hills, Big Spotted Horse, at the suggestion of Gordon Lillie, let the center of his line fall back into the shape of a V.

This brought the Sioux directly into the trap, and, in the darkness of the forest, they suspected no danger until the rifles of the Pawnees opened upon them, and showers of arrows fell into their ranks.

The Sioux' wild shouts of alarm were drowned in the terrible war-cries of the Pawnees, who fell upon their enemies like an avalanche.

In ambush, and in darkness, unacquainted with the country just there, for Black Beard was acting as guide, the Sioux were completely demoralized from the first and broke in wild disorder.

The long line doubled back upon its rear, and there rallied for a few moments.

But the two flanking parties of the Pawnees came down upon either side, for they rode like the wind to the scene when they had word of the approach of the Sioux, and Big Spotted Horse pressed his enemies in the front.

Thus the Sioux, in spite of the courage of their leader, Evil Spirit, were forced to fly, leaving many of their braves dead and wounded on the field, though they carried others off with them.

But for the fact that they reached the foothills in their rear a couple of miles and stood at bay, with their tired horses and wounded, they would have been far more severely beaten.

But the Pawnees dared not follow them into the timber, and when dawn came they discovered that the Sioux were far away upon their retreat.

The victory however had been a grand one, and the Pawnees were well aware that they owed it to Gordon Lillie, and that night in their rejoicing the young pale-face stranger was made a chief of their people.

Among the dead left on the field was Black Beard, who had fallen under the first fire from the ambush, and thus he had met a just doom for having turned renegade to his own race.

After the battle Gordon Lillie had been urged by Harvey Reed and the other settlers to settle among them, and so he homesteaded some land and his neighbors clubbed together and built him a fine cabin and out-houses, cleared some timber for him and did all in their power to prove their appreciation of the warning he had given them, for had the Pawnees been surprised the Sioux would have overrun the settlement with scalp-knife and torch.

The ranch of Gordon was well located, and half-way between the home of Harvey Reed and the Pawnee village.

The settlers stocked it with cattle, and half a hundred ponies were given the young hero by the Pawnee braves.

Learning that Gordon's middle name was William, the settlers, according to border fashion, gave him the nickname of Pawnee Bill, on account of his having been made a chief among that tribe, and thus it was that he obtained the frontier cognomen that heads this story, which, allow me to tell you, kind reader, is no tale of simple fiction, as many now living can vouch for.

With all the kindness shown him by the settlers and his Indian friends, Pawnee Bill, as I will now call Gordon Lillie, was determined to give up his dream of digging a fortune of gold out of the mines, and settle down upon his ranch, at least for awhile.

Having heard of his services rendered the settlements, and the friendly Pawnees, Colonel Royal, the commander of the nearest fort, ap-

pointed him a special scout, under orders to keep his eyes upon the Sioux, who were known to be thirsting for revenge after their signal defeat.

It was a great regret to Pawnee Bill, that he was not able to return to the home of Banker Rolston and prove himself innocent of the charge made against him; but he mentally vowed that some day he would do so, and, as he began to be prosperous in raising horses and cattle, he saw his way to one day make a snug little fortune.

"Let me once have the sum he implied that I took, and I will go to that town and offer it to him, telling him how hard I had worked to get it, and then see if he will still accuse me."

"If he does, I will tell the truth about it."

There was one belief in the mind of Pawnee Bill, and that was that there was really gold in the mountains where the Sioux village was situated.

From what he had heard from May Flower, and the gold he had seen her wear, he was the more convinced that there was precious metal there in the hills, known to the Sioux, and he was anxious to find out.

So, when Colonel Royal had made him a scout, he started off on the trail to make what discoveries he could.

His intelligence, his daring, and the experience he had had, made him a good scout, but the numerous trails he went on alone, failed to discover any gold traces as far as he dared penetrate into the mountains where the Sioux still had their camp.

Thus two years passed away, from the time that he had left his position in the bank, and Pawnee Bill had become a prosperous ranchero.

There had been a number of Indian raids along the border, but he had in nearly every case discovered the coming of the Sioux and Cheyennes, and at last, so persistently did he hang upon the trails of the red-skins, ferreting out their intended expeditions, that he was often called The Prairie Shadower.

Returning one day alone from a scouting trip to the mountains, Pawnee Bill came upon a trail that caused him to come to a sudden halt.

It was a trail left by a wagon train, and it was moving toward the mountains.

Pawnee Bill knew that a small band of Sioux were on the war-path, and without doubt would discover the train and massacre the people.

There could not be many along with the train and so he at once went to the rescue.

He was riding Black Ben who was as good as ever, and he dashed along like the wind on the trail, and after an hour's ride came in sight of the train a mile ahead, moving slowly along over the prairies, all unconscious of danger, for some of the people were loitering along far in the rear.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PAWNEE BILL.

PAWNEE BILL knew that he had no time to lose, so when he came up with the stragglers following the train, he called out:

"The Sioux are on the war-path, and your train is in danger; so make all haste to yonder timber and fortify as best you can."

"I will go after men and come to your aid."

"Lose no time and fortify well, keeping a good watch to-night."

Then he wheeled and rode away across the prairie in the direction of the Pawnee village.

Those to whom he had addressed his startling words, were a man and two boys, and they were considerably frightened.

They hastened on at a run and soon warned the rest of the train, which made all haste for the elevation a mile away, and which was heavily timbered.

There were two-score of wagons in the train, and about as many men, with a number of women and children.

That they were emigrants, seeking homes in the Far West, Pawnee Bill had felt assured, and never having met red-skins, they were not cautious on the march, and their guide had reported them within a day's travel of the place where they were to settle.

The train reached the timber, and the guide, to make up for his carelessness, quickly formed the wagons into a barrier, and a hole was dug to protect the women and children, while the horses, mules and cattle were protected as well as was possible.

Then a guard was set, and the emigrants waited the coming of night.

Soon after dark the guide reported hearing hoof-falls far off upon the prairie, and within half an hour he fired a shot which was answered by a death cry.

Not thinking the emigrants knew that they

were upon their trail, the red-skins had believed they had camped further away, as they saw no camp-fires in the timber, and so were rapidly following when the guide's shot brought them to a standstill.

Instantly they made a charge, but the volley of rifle-bullets quickly let them know that the emigrants were ready for them and that the shot, as they at first believed, had not come from some single scout.

Knowing where their foe was, they surrounded the timber, and began to try and capture the train by cunning.

They were in force treble what the defenders of the train were, and with the latter unused to border warfare, they held the advantage.

Twice they made mock charges, and the rifles rung out, and having caused the emigrants to empty their weapons in one of these advances, they rushed toward the timber from all directions just at dawn.

Another moment and a massacre would have followed; but just then, sweeping over the plain came a band of horsemen, and with wild yells Pawnee Bill and half a dozen of his braves charged down upon the Sioux, who quickly took to flight, not knowing what force they had to meet.

Pawnee Bill and his red-skin parads followed in hot chase, and a running fight was kept up for several miles, and on both sides red-skin horsemen bit the dust.

Then the chase was given up, and the Pawnees, under their white leader returned to the emigrants' camp.

No one had been killed there, but several had been wounded, and all realized what would have been their fate but for the timely succor of Pawnee Bill.

Dressed in a suit of buckskin, handsomely beaded, wearing a slouch hat encircled by a gold cord, and with his golden hair hanging in wavy masses upon his broad shoulders, Pawnee Bill was a very striking looking personage indeed.

He was armed with his rifle and revolvers, and was mounted upon Black Ben, who seemed proud of his young rider and his superb Mexican saddle and bridle.

As he rode up to the train he saw the emigrant to whom he had given the warning the afternoon before, and he was greeted with:

"Come, my friends, this is the brave young man to whom we all owe our lives."

"Your name, please, sir?"

"Pawnee Bill, sir," was the modest reply, "and these are my braves, for I am a chief in the Pawnee tribe."

"Three cheers for Pawnee Bill and his braves, my friends," cried the emigrant, and the cheers were given with a will, women and children joining in lustily, with the men.

"Did you say that your name was Pawnee Bill, Gordon Lillie?" and the questioner a young girl, glided out of the crowd of emigrants and approached the young scout.

He started, his face flushed and he cried:

"Ruby Rolston!"

"Yes, I am Ruby Rolston! your old friend, Gordon, and my father is with me to welcome you, and more, to tell you how cruelly he wronged you."

"But it is a long story to tell it all, and you shall hear it after awhile."

"Father, here is Gordon Lillie, who left us two years ago," and Ruby Rolston turned to the banker, who just then came forward, and said in a quivering voice:

"Can you forgive an old man for wronging you, Gordon, for I confess that I did wrong you?"

"Gladly, sir," and Pawnee Bill grasped the outstretched hand, while he mused to himself:

"How beautiful she has grown, and yet how he has broken, and how strange that they should be here. Certainly some deep trouble has fallen upon them."

"Come, Gordon, let us talk matters over, for I have much to tell you," said the old banker, after the emigrants had all pressed forward to shake the hand of their rescuer, and he led Pawnee Bill over to his tent in the timber, the young man wondering what there was to tell, but glad to see that Ruby was also coming to join them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EMIGRANT'S STORY.

"GORDON, my son, I am anxious to at once tell you all that has happened; to tell you that I was as much rejoiced that I found you innocent as I was pained to believe you guilty of robbing me," said Andrew Rolston, in a voice full of emotion.

"Then you discovered that I was innocent, Mr. Rolston?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"Yes, some six months after you left us, and who do you think was the thief?"

"I know."

"What?"

"I know who it was, sir."

"When did you find it out?" asked Mr. Rolston in surprise.

"The night of the robbery, sir."

"Do you mean that you knew who was guilty when you were accused?"

"I do, sir."

"And would not defend yourself by telling?"

"I would not, sir."

"Why?"

"Tell me, sir, first, who was the guilty one?"

"My son."

"Yes, sir."

"And now let me know why you would not make it known?"

Pawnee Bill glanced at Ruby, blushed, and then said:

"Well, sir, your son saved my life the day that Black Ben would have killed me, and then, sir, I looked upon Miss Ruby as my sweetheart, and you had all been so good to me, that I decided to bear the charge rather than have you, your wife and Miss Ruby suffer."

"You are a noble fellow, Gordon Lillie, to thus sacrifice yourself; but let me tell you that my poor son was guilty only in act, for what he did was done in his sleep."

"Do you mean it, sir?"

"I do, for I missed money after your departure and so set a watch."

"Andrew slept at the bank, as a guard, after I missed more money and discharged the watchman, and, as I still found money taken, I watched myself."

"He would get up out of bed in his sleep, open the safe and take out money, hiding it away in a closet in his room."

"There I found the money you had been accused of taking, and half a dozen other amounts that he had taken at different times."

"I found that he had been wild, gambled, and was given to dissipation and late hours; but what he took he did not use and all was done in his sleep."

"I watched him again, and awoke him when he was robbing the safe, and the shock was a fearful one to him, for he lay ill for weeks."

"Then the rumor went forth that my safe had been robbed, and a run came upon the bank, and I was ruined."

"You have my deepest sympathy, sir."

"I know it, my son; but my wife broke down, and we buried her soon after, and Andrew, on his recovery, went East and got a situation, while I, with Ruby here, left our old home and joined a party of good people coming West to find new homes."

"And here, as we are nearing the end of our long journey, but for you, my noble boy, we would have met our death."

"Yes, Gordon, we owe you our lives," said Ruby in a low, earnest tone.

"You were going over on the river to settle, were you not, sir?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"Yes, we were going to homestead our places."

"I can direct you to better land, sir, and will guide you there."

"It is near my own ranch, and there is room for plenty, with land to spare, while it is further from the Sioux villages, and in less danger of raids from them."

"In the mean time you and Miss Ruby must be my guests, until you can build your home."

"We will, Gordon, for I know the invitation comes from your heart."

"Once I was rich and you homeless; but now our position in life is reversed; but I was brought up a farmer, and can get a new lease in life out here, while my son will join us, he said, and I may yet see many years of life."

"I sincerely hope so, sir," said Pawnee Bill.

And then the emigrants were called together, and the change of destination suggested.

The change was at once acquiesced in, and the train was soon after on its way to the lands which Pawnee Bill had in view for them to settle on; and while he acted as guide, his Pawnee braves followed as an escort to the emigrants, greatly to the joy of the latter, who no longer felt dread of an attack by the Sioux.

CHAPTER XXV.

MAY FLOWER'S LOVE.

THE emigrants settled upon the lands Pawnee Bill selected for them, and they were greatly pleased with their new homes on the far frontier.

There was good land, crystal streams flowed through the valley, and plenty of timber fringed the hills, with rich grazing-lands for stock.

Pawnee Bill selected a choice spot for Mr. Rolston, and aided in building his cabin and getting all in readiness.

He presented both father and daughter with good saddle-horses and some stock, and when Andrew Rolston, Jr., appeared, some weeks after, he was as kind to him as a brother could have been.

The home was at last finished, greatly to Pawnee Bill's regret, for he hated to lose his guests, and the Rolstons moved into their new quarters, which were indeed most comfortable, though of course far different from the palatial mansion they had once dwelt in.

One day as Pawnee Bill was riding along through the forest with Ruby Rolston, he was startled at suddenly beholding in his path none other than May Flower.

She was dressed in her bead-embroidered buckskin suit, and carried her rifle slung at her back, while her pony was hitched not far away in the bushes.

But her face was pale and haggard, and she looked very wretched.

Pawnee Bill had told Ruby of the beautiful daughter of the renegade chief, and when he spoke her name, in amazement at seeing her, she knew who she was.

"Why, May Flower, you here?" he cried, as he sprung from his saddle.

"Yes, Lillie," was the sad reply.

"You look like a ghost."

"I am not well, Lillie."

"Come to my home with me, and I will care for you, May Flower," and Ruby slipped from her saddle and approached the girl.

"You are Ruby, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Lillie told me of you long ago."

"But, May Flower, why are you here?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"To see you."

"You are sick, so go with Ruby, as she asks you."

"No, I have come to see you, Lillie, to tell you the secret I promised to tell you."

"You deserted me that night, Lillie, and nearly broke my heart, for I loved you, and I love you now."

"You escaped in safety, and it was your warning to the Pawnees, who drove the Sioux back that night."

"My father was wounded, and he never recovered, and some months ago he died."

"Your father dead?"

"Yes, and he told me to go to a settler's home—one who dwelt far from here—and tell him to care for me, for he was my uncle."

"I escaped from the Sioux, for they would not have allowed me to go, and I found the cabin."

"But my uncle and his family had been murdered, other settlers told me, and their house was haunted."

"But it was haunted by a poor old man whom I found dying there, clad in a white bear's robe."

"He it was who had murdered my uncle and his family, and afterward had haunted the cabin, having a hiding-place in the chimney."

"He was mad, but reason came to him before he died, and he told me all."

"The settlers buried him, and I came then to seek you, Lillie."

"I found that you loved Ruby, so I would not have your heart."

"I have haunted you both like a spirit, and I have heard you tell Ruby you loved her, and her words of love to you in return."

"I then decided to speak to you, Lillie, to speak to you both, for I am ill, and oh, so tired, tired of life."

"My poor friend," said Ruby, while tears fell from her eyes.

"You are good and true, Ruby, and I love you."

"I love you so much, that before I leave you I wish you to do me a favor."

"Will you?"

"Anything, everything, May Flower."

"I do not wish Lillie to forget me, I do not wish you to forget me, so I beg of you, Ruby, to take my name."

"Ruby is a pretty name I know; but so is May, and will you not let Lillie call you May?"

"Think, when you become his wife you will have the name of two flowers—May, Lily—"

"Will you do this for me?"

"I promise you, and if Gordon says so I will not break my word."

"I will be glad to call you May, for I would

never care to forget the name of May Flower," Pawnee Bill said, earnestly.

"Then remember, you are May now."

"I will not forget it."

"You have made me happy at least."

"Now, Lillie, let me tell you my secret."

"What secret, May?"

"Do you not remember I was called the Gold Queen?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, it was because I found what father called gold pockets in the wash-out in the mountains."

"I saved the gold, and he made it into bands for me; but I do not wear them now, and will give them to May," and she emphasized the name.

"The rest of the gold I found, I put in a buckskin bag and it is tied to my saddle yonder and I give it to you, Lillie."

"My dear May, I would not touch your gold."

"But you must, for I do not need it, and guess it's a large fortune, though I don't know."

Going to her horse she soon returned with a buckskin bag of gold.

From it she took the bands which she had worn, and which her father had beaten out for her and gave them to May Rolston, as she had consented to be called to please the poor girl.

The little pieces of gold that filled the bag she then handed to Pawnee Bill.

"No, May, I will not touch your gold."

She gazed at him an instant, and said in a low tone:

"It is yours, for I leave it to you."

"Good-by, May, good-by, Lillie."

"Don't forget me."

Turning, she ran to her horse, bounded into the saddle and sped away.

Both Pawnee Bill and May were deeply moved by what had occurred.

It was getting dark and already had she disappeared, so, hoping to find her the next day, Pawnee Bill tied the bag of gold to his saddle and the two rode on.

He knew that May Flower's fortune was but a couple of thousand dollars at best; but that she, poor girl, knew not the value of money.

On to May's home they rode and told the story to Mr. Rolston and his son, who were also impressed by it.

After supper Pawnee Bill started home, and upon arriving there was startled by finding a form lying at his door.

"My God! it is May Flower, and she has killed herself at my very door!" cried Pawnee Bill.

It was too true; the girl had taken her life by shooting herself through the heart.

In her hand she still grasped the fatal pistol, and about it was wrapped a slip of paper.

On it was written:

"LILLIE:—"

"I did not care to live without your love."

"Be happy with May, and ever call her by my name."

"The gold is yours, for I leave it to you."

"Bury me in the timber where I last parted from you, and sometimes visit my grave."

"This is all I ask."

"Good-by to you and May."

"MAY FLOWER,"

"The Gold Queen of the Sioux."

Such was the touching letter from the unfortunate girl, and bitter tears fell from the eyes of Pawnee Bill as he read the lines.

The next day she was buried in a rude coffin, in the spot she had selected, and, as it was the spring of the year, May Rolston covered the grave with May flowers, while at its head Pawnee Bill placed a board, into which he had skillfully cut the following:

"POOR MAY FLOWER,

"THE GOLD QUEEN.

"May she rest in peace."

A year after the tragic death of the beautiful Gold Queen, Pawnee Bill and May Rolston were married, and since that time the name of May has never been forgotten by either young husband or his lovely wife.

On many of his trails, no matter what the danger, May Lillie has accompanied her husband, who has won a name as a gallant and dashing scout, and is known far and wide upon the frontier, as a white chief among his true friends the Pawnees, who are ever welcome guests at his home, as is Pawnee Bill and May in the tepees of their red-skin parads.

THE END.

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